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Vol. LXXXIX

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Publication issued every week by Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Ormond G. Smith, President; George C. Smith, Vice President and Treasurer; George C. Smith, Jr., Vice President; Ormond V. Gould, Secretary. Copyright, 1926, by Street & Smith Corporation, New York. Copyright, 1926, by Street & Smith Corporation, Great Britain. Entered as Second-class Matter, September 4, 1917, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Canadian Subscription, \$7.50. Foreign, \$8.50.

YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION, \$6.00

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DETECTIVE STORY

MAGAZINE

EVERY WEEK

Vol. LXXXIX

December 18, 1926

No. 1



DOOMED AT FOUR

By Christopher B. Booth

Author of "Dark Deeds," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE INTRUDER.

WITH weary, dragging step the man plodded on and on through the cold night. He was going nowhere and walked with no purpose but one, and that to keep himself warm. Hours before a policeman had driven him from

the haven of the subway into the biting teeth of a chill wind which cut through his flesh to the very bone. He regretted afterward that he had not resisted. Perhaps arrest would have given him at least the recompense of a bed to lie on and a blanket to cover himself with.

There was, in addition to weariness, signs of feebleness in his shambling course. Seeing him, shoulders hunched

forward, tottering at times, one would have thought him an old man. But, glimpsing his face as he passed beneath the street lamps at such times as he lifted his chin from the upturned collar of his frayed serge coat to blow on his hands, which were grimy with dirt, red and raw with the cold, one saw that he was young and that his feebleness came from lack of food. In his face, gaunt and white, in the dull anguish of his dark-circled eyes, there was written the gnawing ache of hunger.

Weakness halted him. He had been walking almost steadily since ten o'clock and it was now a quarter of two. Before the streets had become empty of people he had stopped any number of them, mumbling, "I'm hungry," but begging is one of the accomplished arts, and it is the professional mendicant that is slipped the sympathetic dime. The man who needed it so badly got only scowling rebuffs.

The spot where the derelict had paused was at the entrance of an apartment house. A subdued light burned in the ornate lobby behind the high and wide glass doors. Against the white marble of the walls was the silhouette of a steam radiator. There was warmth behind those doors—warmth, and it tempted him.

"They can't more than put me out," he told himself in a chattering whisper and caught at the large brass handle. The pneumatic spring which kept the doors automatically closed taxed his strength to the utmost, although children managed it with no great difficulty. Stealthily he slipped within, his entrance being practically noiseless.

The steam radiator gave off a mild warmth, but it was by no means hot. The man pressed his body tight against the metal coils and hugged the tops of them with his trembling hands. Gradually the chill left his body, but as the numbness departed the hunger pangs

became more acute. He drew his belt tighter and clamped his teeth together against the moan which might betray his trespass and get him booted into the street.

This apartment house, now outclassed by others more modern and more pretentious, was losing its list of high-class tenants and had been forced to reduce rentals. The rugs on the mosaic floor of the lobby needed renovating. The elevator looked shabby.

The sole attendant at night was a light-colored negro, a Jamaican, who operated the elevator and looked after the telephone switchboard located in a little compartment built beneath the stairs. When the hour became late he would run the lift down into the basement where he kept a cot, something that certainly would not have been permitted when the house had been at its prime. Sometimes he slept so soundly that it took a great deal of bell ringing to wake him.

Silence within the entrance lobby was so complete that after a time the homeless, hungry man hovering by the warmth of the radiator became curious and ventured toward the tiny space beneath the stairs and looked in. It was unoccupied.

He stood for a moment or two, his hollow eyes making a quick inventory. Perhaps he was hoping there might be something he could lay hands on and turn into the price of a meal. On top of the switchboard, ticking heavily, was a cheap alarm clock.

Then he saw the brass key, attached to a small metal hoop that hung from the wall by a nail. He knew, as almost any one would have known, that this must be the apartment-house pass-key. A sudden gleam shot into the eyes of the young man. The key was an invitation; with it he could unlock the doors of the apartments, that is provided the tenants had not locks of their own.

His hand darted out and seized the key. He moved quickly now, for the stimulation of an idea, the stirring of a hope, mastered his weariness and weakness. With as much haste as instinctive stealth would allow, he made for the stairs, ascending to the second floor and then to the third. But the climb exhausted him again. Faint and dizzy, he leaned heavily against the wall, gasping for breath.

As a measure of economy there was a hall light burning only on each alternate floor. The third was shrouded in thick shadows, with barely sufficient illumination to find one's way.

One door promised as much as another, and the prowler used no method in making a selection. He merely picked the nearest, found that there was but a single lock, and inserted the pass-key. A faint click, the soft whine of the moving hinges, and the entry had been accomplished.

A novice at burglary, nevertheless every movement was one of such caution that he might have been a professional. Gently he closed the door behind him, listening for any sound that would warn him that his presence was suspected. The apartment was wrapped in silence.

The invader faced a long hallway, dark as a cavern. He began creeping forward, his feet brushing lightly over the padded carpet. At his left was a door, open; from within came an endless *drip, drip* of a leaky water faucet. It was, he knew, a bathroom. He tiptoed on.

Another open door and the kitchen of the apartment, feebly lighted by a thin jet of gas from the pilot burner of the range. A kitchen meant an ice box and an ice box meant food. What he wanted was food. At the moment it was the only thought in his mind.

Slipping within the kitchen he closed the door and did something that no seasoned burglar would have done. He

snapped on the electric light. Wolflike he pounced upon the ice box. A cold roast chicken, bottles of milk, any number of delicacies were inside, and the sight of these things made his stomach fairly throb. Hunger so great as his overrides the civilized refinements; he seized the chicken in both hands and sunk his teeth into it, stripping off the meat in great, ravenous mouthfuls.

A plate in the ice box slid off its precarious balance and crashed against the porcelain lining. It should have warned him to flight, but nothing could have driven him from his feast. More important than liberty, more important than anything, was this food. Nothing else seemed to matter.

In the bedroom at the front of the apartment slept Thomas Karch and his wife. The windows overlooked the street and through the curtains there filtered enough light from a corner lamp to give a dim illumination to the interior. The furniture, rich and massive, indicated that Karch was a man of means.

The couple rested in separate beds. The coverings of that occupied by Mrs. Karch rose in a great mound of white and moved noticeably with her heavy, sonorous breathing, for she was a huge woman and her excessive size made respiration a labored and noisy function.

There had been a time when Mrs. Karch had been only buxomly plump. But that had been a good many years ago. With growing revulsion Tom Karch had seen her ankles thickening, and had watched her body become more and more gross. Worst of all, she became contentedly stupid and careless about her appearance.

Tom Karch was a man who had gone up in the world. A carpenter when he had married, he had developed into a contractor and political connections had made the profits large. Long since he would have moved from this apartment

to a more pretentious one, but what was the use going into a swell neighborhood, among swell people with a wife that would only make him a laughingstock?

Restlessly Tom Karch stirred in his bed, tormented by his thoughts. He had been awake for an hour or more. He was thinking of a woman whose ankles were slender and shapely, and whose figure was slim and graceful. She had a pretty, animated face, and her eyes were alight with youth. She was keen-witted, clever.

But between this woman and himself stood a mountain—a great, unavoidable mountain—his wife. She no longer expected nor insisted upon his fidelity, but she would not, he knew, ever agree to a divorce.

Tom Karch suddenly tensed, listening. He had heard the dish clattering against the inside the ice box. So faintly that he could not be sure, there reached his ears other sounds which, as it happened, was the crunching of chicken bones as the famished man out there in the kitchen crushed them in his ravenous eagerness.

Men had accused Tom Karch of ruthlessness but no one had ever charged him with physical cowardice. He slid his bare feet from under the covers and went to the drawer of his chiffonier where, from beneath some odds and ends of his plentiful wardrobe, he took a revolver.

With the revolver in his hand, he went into the hall. His jaw tightened as he saw the slice of light beneath the kitchen door. Those crunching sounds were now unmistakable—there was some one in the kitchen. He leaped forward, the gun ready for action.

"Stick 'em up, you crook!" he gritted as he hurled himself into the kitchen.

The young intruder looked dazed, sheepish. The remaining portion of the chicken dropped from his suddenly limp hands and thudded on the floor. He grinned weakly, apologetically, and

moved his hands against the sides of his shabby coat for a no-more-sinister purpose than to wipe the grease from his fingers. Karch, however, interpreted the movement as being a reach for a weapon. Gaunt, unshaven, the intruder certainly looked disreputable and, if one ignored that sheepish grin, perhaps dangerous.

Karch pulled the trigger. A spurt of flame, the crash of the shot, and the harmless derelict, with no sound other than a moaning intake of his breath, gave a lurch and pitched forward on his face.

For the matter of some ten seconds Tom Karch did not move. The revolver gripped in his hand, finger curled tensely around the trigger, he stood staring grimly down at the shabby figure, at the crimson stain which spread slowly over the tile pattern of the linoleum.

It was during those ten brief seconds that the hideous idea leaped full-born into his brain. He did not shrink from it, but embraced it eagerly as the solution of his domestic discontent. The light of a terrible and calculating purpose glinted in his eyes.

"He's dead, the no-good bum," muttered Karch. "He got what was coming to him. No one will know, not even suspect——"

If he were to take advantage of this opportunity, he must act quickly. Spinning quickly around on his bare heel and the revolver now gripped even more tightly in his hand, his mouth set into a twisted line of horrible determination, he hurried back to the bedroom where his wife slept noisily, undisturbed by the shot.

He knew, perhaps, that if he hesitated his nerve would fail him. With one hand he pulled back the bed coverings. The muzzle of the weapon darted close to his wife's breast. He fired. Her great body quivered. Her eyes opened, bulging with dazed terror through heavy eyelids. Enough light filtered

through the street windows to splash across his face, revealing his features horribly contorted with murderous purpose.

"Tom!" she cried in a gasping, choking whisper. "Tom!"

Karch fired again, then a third time. His safety depended upon her being dead before the police arrived.

CHAPTER II.

THE LAWYER'S STORY.

LEAN and bronzed and bearded, Anthony Spence returned to New York aboard a dingy tramp steamer that had picked him up in Para. Camera-man for one of the news-reel companies, he had spent a year and a half in the Brazilian jungles, finding strange tribes of people, recording their life and weird customs on many feet of film. His was a roving commission and the pay he would receive seemed meager return for the time spent and the risk involved, but hazards had always attracted him.

The steamer docked at a North River pier in the early morning. Tony Spence went ashore in some haste and sought a good restaurant. Food aboard the *Sally K.* had been pretty bad.

He bought a morning newspaper, the first New York paper he had seen in almost a year and, looking over the headlines after ordering a breakfast that was most prodigious as New York breakfasts go, he experienced that peculiar sensation that one always feels on seeing his own name in black type.

Not his own name, of course—the family name. With a decidedly unpleasant reaction he read:

SPENCE MUST DIE IN CHAIR; GOVERNOR REFUSES LAST PLEA

Tony was instantly resentful of this ugly blot on the name of Spence, although it didn't in the least occur to him

that there might be any traceable degree of kinship. With a mixture of resentment and sympathy he began to scan the printed lines. Suddenly, a sensation of horrified doubt and apprehension came to him, for there was his brother's name. Joe a murderer? Oh, that was absurd, impossible! Joe's name, Joe's age—but Spence wasn't such an uncommon name. It was coincidence. But, nevertheless, Tony's heart was in his throat and the printed lines blurred and faded in front of his straining eyes as he read anxiously down the column.

Joseph Spence, twenty-three, must die in the electric chair Thursday for the murder of Mrs. Thomas Karch, wife of the wealthy contractor, shot to death in the Karch apartment last February. Yesterday the governor refused the last plea on behalf of the condemned youth, made by his attorney, Franklin Wallace.

The governor made it clear that he will not extend executive clemency to any one who takes a life in the commission of a robbery.

Spence, by his own admissions, had entered the Karch apartment by means of a stolen pass-key, and Attorney Wallace's plea that the convicted man was temporarily insane from hunger had no weight with the governor.

There was more of it, a great deal more, but the only details that Tony Spence was interested in were those which might tell him whether or not this was Joe. In one of the final paragraphs he found no further room for hopeful doubts.

Young Spence has been a pathetically solitary figure in the death house. He has had no relatives to make an effort in his behalf, and no friends. The only visitor to the doomed man's cell has been his attorney. Somewhere there is a brother, wandering in the out-of-the-way places of the world, unaware of the fate—

Tony Spence read no more. His hands were shaking so violently that he could scarcely hold the paper. Uncertainty was no longer possible. It was Joe. His own brother doomed to death

—for murder! Unsteadily he got to his feet. The waiter who had taken his order hurried forward.

"You are ill, sir?"

Without verbal response Tony plunged his hand into his pocket, tossing a five-dollar bill to the table. It would cover his check with a generous tip to spare. Numb with the horror of it, trying to understand how it could be true, trying to believe, vainly, that it was all some ghastly mistake, he blundered along the street, bumping into people that he failed to see, half a dozen times escaping the perils of the traffic by the breadth of a hair.

Some time later he found his way to the office of Franklin Wallace. The latter's name was not included in that of the firm with which he was associated. In fact, Mr. Wallace was not many years progressed beyond law school and yet, despite his youth, he was an earnest, well-poised young man who impressed one with the possession of an alert mind and the promise of getting ahead in his profession.

"You don't have to tell me who you are," the young lawyer said quickly as Tony Spence found speech difficult. "When the operator in the outer office phoned over your name, I knew you must be Joe's brother."

A handshake may tell a great deal, and that of Wallace conveyed a warm sympathy that was surely sincere.

"I didn't know until an hour ago," Tony Spence said thickly. "I've been down in the tropics—my boat docked this morning. I saw a newspaper. I couldn't believe, can't believe now." His voice choked up. "Mr. Wallace, Joe was the softest-hearted kid you could imagine—too soft, I'd always thought. How he could have done this thing——"

"He didn't," said Wallace, his own voice none too steady. "The boy is innocent. I'm as certain of that as I am of my own existence."

"Then there is, there must be still hope!"

"There's no hope, Spence; none. The governor spoke the final word yesterday afternoon. I did my best for him and failed. I'm not ordinarily an eloquent pleader but I was eloquent yesterday. For a moment or two I saw a chance for a reprieve, but when I stopped talking, there were the cold, unemotional facts."

"But if he's innocent—merciful heavens! they don't want to take the life of an innocent man!" cried Tony Spence. "Surely——"

"You couldn't have got an accurate understanding of the circumstances from what you read in the morning papers," Wallace broke in. "The circumstances—well, I'd better explain the entire situation."

"Yes," Tony Spence urged hoarsely, his eyes fixed intently upon the attorney's face.

"When you left New York a year and a half ago, your brother had a job in a department store. He got twenty-five a week and spent as he went along."

"He always did," nodded Tony. "Neither of us has ever been very practical."

"Joe lost his position," proceeded Wallace, "and before he could connect with something else he began getting shabby. That pretty well finished his chances, I suppose, and it didn't take him long to get completely down and out."

"Go on, man, go on!"

"The night that it happened—the shooting—Joe had been walking the streets for hours. He had no place to sleep, hadn't tasted food in two days or more. It was February, understand, and bitterly cold. He took refuge in the entrance of an apartment house. Just what was in his mind I don't know, and I think he hardly knows himself. Hunger does things to a man."

"I understand," groaned Tony

Spence. "I've been hungry myself. Tell me the rest."

"The negro elevator boy was asleep in the basement. The apartment-house pass-key was hanging beside the telephone switchboard. Joe took it and got into the Karch apartment with it. From there on, we have two accounts of what happened—your brother's story and Karch's story. I'll give you Karch's account of it first."

"Karch claims that he was awakened by some one in the room, boldly ransacking the drawers—Joe, of course. There was a revolver in one of those drawers—Karch's gun."

"Karch claims that his wife was also awakened and that when she screamed, the burglar warned her to keep her mouth shut and that when she screamed a second time, he made a rush toward the bed and shot her three times through the body. She was dead when the police got there."

Tony Spence broke the grip of incredulous horror. "It's a lie!" he shouted.

"When the police got there, also," the lawyer went on, "your brother was more dead than alive himself. There was a bullet in his chest that had missed his heart by the fraction of an inch. They took him to a hospital and it was almost a week before he sufficiently rallied to make a statement. Half starved as he was, vitality at low ebb, the wonder of it was that he did recover."

"Karch's story is that he grappled with Joe, that they struggled along the hall, Karch finally getting the gun into his own hands. He fired—self-defense, you see. The police did find drawers in the bedroom ransacked, a console table overturned in the hall, a vase smashed, Joe's finger prints were on the revolver, too, but——"

"What is Joey's account of it? He didn't do it. The boy was incapable of such brutality!"

"He denies that he had been inside the bedroom at all. Got no farther than the kitchen, he says. Admits helping himself to a cooked chicken that was in the ice box, claims that Karch burst in upon him, shot him down—and that's all he remembers until he got back his senses, days later, in Bellevue. As I said, I believe the boy. I am convinced that it was Karch who committed the murder."

Tony Spence's mind groped clumsily, trying to get some sort of a comprehensive grasp upon these astounding facts. Suddenly he leaned forward, rising half to his feet as the lawyer's last statement came to him with full force.

"Karch did it! That's the answer, Mr. Wallace! Karch killed his wife and framed the murder on Joe."

The lawyer inclined his head. "That's my theory of it, Spence, exactly. Karch, I have no doubt, is guilty, but every bit of evidence was against your brother."

"Did you tell the governor what you thought?"

"In confidence, yes. I pleaded for more time to work up a case against Karch, but that didn't make much impression. My strongest card was that, taking it for granted Joe did the shooting, he was out of his mind from hunger. Even that failed."

The lawyer paused, his own face white and drawn, and made a weary gesture of accepted defeat.

"There's nothing more to be done," he added heavily. "The governor alone stands between Joe and the chair, and the governor honestly feels that he cannot interfere. He made it clear to me that further efforts were useless."

Anthony Spence leaped to his feet, his hands clenched, his eyes blazing hot.

"Nothing more to be done?" he cried. "Do you expect me to sit down and count the hours until they take him, my brother, and—and kill him?"

"There's nothing either of us can do, Spence. I can tell you now that the governor will refuse to see you. Of course, if you want to try——"

"It's not the governor I'm going to see, Mr. Wallace. Karch! That's the man I'm going to see and, so help me, I'll get my fingers around his throat and unless he talks——"

"No use deluding yourself with thoughts like that," the lawyer interrupted. "In the first place, Karch isn't within five hundred miles of New York."

"How do you know that?"

"I've been keeping tabs on Karch. There's one outstanding reason why a man like Tom Karch would want to kill his wife—another woman. I've been hoping that he would make some move in this direction, but he's too canny a bird for that."

"There's been no money to hire private detectives, but my sister, always interested in my cases, tried to help us out by doing a bit of volunteer sleuthing. Karch has gone to Chicago. Wanting to get away from the headlines in the New York papers has something to do with his absence, I fancy. Anyhow, he's quite beyond reach."

Tony Spence sat down heavily. "Then there's nothing I can do, absolutely nothing?" His voice was hollow, his face drawn with suffering.

The young lawyer was silent for a moment.

"You'll want to go with me to the prison," he said huskily. "I was going, anyhow. I was afraid that I would be the only one to tell him good-by. Seeing you will mean——"

"They will let me see him—talk to him?"

"Yes, and it will make him very happy to say good-by to you. He's been wishing for that."

"Happy?" groaned Tony. "These few hours between him and the electric

chair, and you talk of him being happy! Merciful heavens!"

"He said to me the last time I saw him that if he could tell you with his own lips he was innocent, you would believe him. He wants, I think, beyond anything else to feel that you, his brother, have faith in his innocence, that for you at least his memory will not have the ugly blot of the crime for which he has been convicted. So, you see, your coming will make it easier for him."

Anthony Spence crushed his hat between his hands and lifted a ghastly face. Behind a film of tears his eyes went hard. Breathing heavily he started to speak but checked himself, and the words that came from his lips were not, Wallace knew, what he had been about to say.

"We'll go," he said, "just as quickly as you can."

CHAPTER III.

THE PLEDGE.

A LIFE of adventuring had taken Anthony Spence through many hazards, which he had always met with a cool head and a steady nerve. He had taken battle pictures for the army during the war, had seen men die, but his nerve completely failed him as he entered the great prison. He was shaking like a leaf and felt so weak that he wondered how his legs were able to support his weight.

Somewhere within that maze of stone and steel was the place they called the death house. And in one of those cells they had Joe, marking off the dread, anguishing hours for the time of his extermination. Death was horrible enough, but the cold, precise calculation of it, the agony of waiting, waiting! And Joe innocent!

Franklin Wallace, the lawyer, was making arrangements in the warden's office for this farewell visit. Presently

he came back into the anteroom and touched Tony's arm.

"I know how you must feel, Spence," he said gently. "It's a terrible ordeal, but keep a grip on yourself. Going to pieces isn't going to make it any easier for either of you."

"All right," Tony answered thickly.

A guard conducted them along dismal corridors. They came to that section of the prison where the condemned men were housed. Anthony Spence found it impossible to think clearly. In this daze he found Wallace halting him before one of the cells, the whole front of it not only barred but covered with a tightly woven steel mesh. The purpose of this was to prevent any article—perhaps an instrument of self-destruction—being smuggled to these doomed creatures. The law demanded its legal toll and did not propose to be cheated.

"Hello, Joe," said Wallace, trying to speak naturally and perhaps even cheerfully. "I've brought some one to see you—some one you've been wanting very much."

Tony Spence held his breath and took another step forward, squinting through the grating. Within the cell a figure in drab denim darted up from the gray blanket which was covering the cot. Tony recoiled.

They had already shaved his head, made it ready for the steel cap of the electric chair. It didn't look like Joe with his light, wavy hair ruthlessly shorn, it couldn't be Joe without the old boyish, happy-go-lucky smile and the lovable deviltry that had danced in his eyes. His face had the pale gloss of wax.

"Tony! Tony, you've come! Thank Heaven, you've come!" And he was laughing, actually laughing, in one precious little moment of happiness.

Anthony Spence tried to speak, but his tongue would not move. He could only make a choking, sobbing sound

and, forgetting that the screen between them prevented him clasping his brother's white, bloodless fingers between his own, reached out his hand impotently. He wanted with baffled yearning to put his arm about Joe's shoulder, to hold him close, as he had not done for years. Speech continued to fail him, words seemed so hopelessly inadequate.

"Something kept telling me that you would come, Tony," Joe was saying, "but this morning I'd about given up hope. Ah, it's mighty good to see you before——"

The light fled from his eyes but, strangely enough, there was not the abject, cringing fear that one might have expected to see. Anthony Spence could only groan.

The doomed boy pressed his body hard against the steel bars. His face had become tense and earnest.

"You know I never lied to you, Tony, and I couldn't lie to you, now. If I tell you, on my oath, that I am innocent, you'll believe me—won't you, Tony?"

"Yes!" Anthony Spence said hoarsely. "I'd believe it without your telling me."

"Thanks, Tony. That makes it easier—a lot easier. What you'd think, what you might *have* to think, worried me a lot."

"Mr. Wallace has told me everything about it, Joe. The guilty man is free, and you—you have to pay with your life. Nothing we can do——"

"There's no use talking about that, Tony. Death doesn't matter—so much. A man isn't afraid to die when his conscience is clear. It's the waiting and waiting, the long, long hours. Yes, waiting is the worst of it, Tony. I wish it were over."

Again Anthony Spence found it impossible to speak.

"I'd like to talk about the old times, when we were kids," Joe's voice went on. "Those are the happiest times a

fellow has. I'd like to talk about those days back home, if you don't mind."

A thousand boyhood memories flooded through Tony's mind, making the ordeal all the greater, but he steeled himself to it and for a long time the two brothers rummaged together through the rich treasure chests of childhood. Their first circus—what a red-letter day that had been!

Other things that had happened, and Joe's eyes, again and again, shone with their old dancing light. From these joyous yesterdays he borrowed forgetfulness of the black door down the corridor which opened to eternity. Tony did his best to bear up under the strain, but one would have thought it was he, not Joe, who faced the dread night which would come to an end with dawn and death.

A guard touched Anthony's shoulder. The time limit had been stretched by the matter of some minutes.

"You'll have to go now," he said gruffly.

A wild, half-insane passion burned through Tony's body. He hated these guards, hated every one in the world except his helpless brother there in the cell. His hands clenched, his muscles bulged. The guard had seen these signs before and was human enough to understand.

"Take it easy, mister," he said with a not unkind sternness. "Can't you be as game as the kid?"

Joe, however, was trembling now as he realized that the moment of parting had come.

"Good-by, Tony," he whispered, his voice breaking. "It's all right, Tony. Good-by, Tony."

"Good-by!" How cruel that word can be, but never so cruel, perhaps, as in circumstances like these.

Denied the last farewell clasp of his brother's hand, Anthony Spence, with the prison guard urging him on one side and Lawyer Wallace on the other, took

a staggering step backward. He could no longer see Joe's white, drawn face, for his eyes were blind with tears.

"Good-by, Tony!" The echo of his brother's voice followed him along the corridors. The ring of feet on the stones seemed to be crying it, the clang of the steel gates hammering it into his brain.

All through the night Anthony Spence paced the floor of the hotel room while Franklin Wallace watched him with pity and anxiety. A man couldn't go on like that, thought the lawyer, unless something gave way. He had got a bottle of liquor on a doctor's prescription, for if any one ever needed the refuge of alcohol, this tortured chap needed it now. But Tony had refused to touch a drop of it.

He spoke only to answer in mumbling monosyllables. His body was here in the room of the hotel, but his thoughts were with Joe there in the big, ugly prison squatted against the face of the river's cliff. Tony was suffering more than Joe. So vivid was the horrible picture of it all that he might as well have been an actual spectator to the ghastly preliminaries of the execution. With the eye of his mind he was seeing it all.

As the hour of dawn came closer, Anthony Spence began to speak in jerky, feverish sentences.

"I know how it's done," he said. "Just about now one of the guards is going in to—to slit the leg of his trousers. They always do that to get the steel clamp on the bare flesh. The chaplain is with him——"

"In Heaven's name, don't torture yourself like this!" Wallace pleaded with a shiver. "You'll drive yourself mad, man!"

"Wouldn't you be pretty nearly crazy if it were your brother they were killing down there this morning? Wallace, I can't stand it, I tell you! I can't stand it!" At last Tony was cracking. He

toppled back to the side of the bed and began beating his hands against his knees in his frenzy of despair.

"I've been hoping against hope that there could be a miracle, that the governor would telephone at the last moment and stop it. It's hard to believe that an innocent man will die that way. Tell me, Wallace—tell me honestly if there is even one little bit of hope left."

Franklin Wallace couldn't lie to him. Instead of answering, he uncorked the bottle of liquor and pressed it upon the other.

"Drink it. For your own sake, drink it, Spence," he urged.

Tony's agony had become so acute that at last he welcomed anything which would dull the ache of his brain and the heavy throbbing of his heart. Almost eagerly he seized it.

"I mustn't let myself go to pieces," he muttered. "I've got a job on my hands. I must——"

"Yes," said the lawyer, thinking that the other meant to clear Joe's memory. "Drink it, Spence."

Tony lifted the bottle to his lips and drained almost half of it down his throat. He became calmer after a few minutes but his face hardened to a terrible grimness.

Dawn grayed the eastern horizon. Tony saw it and his body convulsed as though a fatal voltage were burning out his own life cells. His head sagged down until his chin rested on his chest.

"They've done it!" he said in a thick whisper. "They've killed him!"

The lawyer did not dispute him, waited a few minutes and then got to his feet.

"If you'd prefer to leave the arrangements with me——" he suggested gently.

Tony Spence understood. He stirred, lifting his haggard face.

"No," he answered, "I'll go with you."

They left the hotel and made their

way along the street. Tony walked with a slow, dragging step, silent, dejected, but grim. Up the hill, from the direction of the prison, a black undertaker's wagon lunged through the morning mist and shot past them.

Anthony Spence shook all over and clutched at Wallace's arm.

"That's Joe," he said hollowly. "Innocent, but some one had to be punished. Laws must be upheld. What about justice? I ask you, Wallace, what about justice?"

The young attorney sighed heavily and unhappily.

"It's one of those mistakes that happen sometimes. Even the law makes mistakes."

"I'm talking about justice!" cried Tony, leaning forward, his eyes burning hot. "There is my brother; the law has killed him for another man's crime. It's Karch I blame. Understand that. It was Karch who sent Joe to the chair." He drew a deep breath and his fingers squeezed tighter about Wallace's arm. "There will be justice," he said, "because I will be justice, and Karch can not escape—from me."

CHAPTER IV.

TONY GOES AWAY.

AFTER Joe's burial, Franklin Wallace insisted upon Anthony Spence going home with him and this invitation was seconded by the lawyer's sister, June. The three of them had been the only ones to follow the hearse from the tiny funeral chapel to the cemetery.

"I like Tony Spence," Wallace said to June. "I want to do something, if I can, to pull him out of this morbid state of mind that he's in. I'm afraid he's in a dangerous mood—dangerous for himself as well as for Thomas Karch. There's been tragedy enough."

"I rather like him, too," June answered. "Poor fellow! It was so much harder for him, coming home like

that and getting the full brunt of the shock almost as soon as he got his feet off the gangplank." She drew a deep breath. "He has the face of the man who does things, who never quits until he's done what he sets out to do. And I think it's splendid of him to want to clear his brother's name of that horrible stigma."

Franklin Wallace shook his head.

"That's just the point, June. Nothing will stop him in his present frame of mind—nothing."

"You mean——"

"Oh, you must know what I mean. If he doesn't get the goods on Karch—and there's not a chance in ten thousand that he can—he'll be tempted to take vengeance into his own hands. I'm not so sure but that he's contemplating that right now. I want to get that idea out of his hand."

And because both brother and sister made refusal of their invitation so difficult, Anthony Spence agreed to become a guest at the Wallace apartment. The mental strain, coupled with an attack of jungle fever from which he had none too fully recovered, demanded its toll, and Tony became a more permanent guest than either himself or Wallace and his sister had even contemplated.

In fact, Tony, for the matter of several weeks, was quite seriously ill. June refused to consider any suggestion of his being moved to a hospital. Most of the time she nursed him herself and during his convalescence sympathy became, on her part, an emotion stronger than that. Unless Anthony Spence were a fool, he must have known—and Tony was not a fool.

And June, unless she were blind, must have seen and understood the expression in his eyes when he looked at her—and June Wallace was by no means blind.

He spoke no word and she, thinking that she knew what locked his tongue,

admired him the more for it. Still it was only fair, she told herself, that it should be made clear to him that what had happened to his brother made no difference in so far as she was concerned.

The Wallace apartment was in Brooklyn Heights, in an old-fashioned building with a view of New York Harbor. There was a little stone balcony overlooking a scene which was always interesting during the day with great ships and little ships moving out to sea or coming back from a voyage, tugboats screeching hoarsely, and the great buildings of Manhattan coming down to the Battery. But it was night on the harbor that June Wallace loved best.

There was just room on the balcony for two chairs. Franklin had rushed off immediately after dinner to make a talk at a civic club. Tony and June were alone. They had been silent for quite a little while, each lost in his own thoughts.

"A city can be so ugly, and yet so beautiful," she said softly. "Life is like that, too."

"All of us can't have your balcony to see it from," he answered. "Life, also, is like that." There was no mistaking the bitter edge of his voice.

June leaned toward him. "Tony," she said earnestly, "are you going to let the ugly things make you always blind to the beautiful ones?"

He did not answer.

"We are friends, Tony," she went on, "we are very good friends. You must turn your eyes away from the past, and look toward the future. I think you know what I mean. You must stop thinking so much about—about things that can't be undone."

"I'd rather not talk about it," he told her huskily. "If you please, June, I'd much rather not."

"But I feel that I must. I can't

blame you for being bitter, but you should carry on just as though it had never happened."

"As though I could!"

"Oh, but, Tony, you can. If you're thinking that it will make any difference in what people will think of you, then you're wrong. I don't, for one."

"That's because you're sure poor Joe was innocent. No, don't deny it, June. Joe was my brother. I must carry the stain until I can remove it. For his sake as well as for my own, that's what I'm going to try and do. After that——"

He broke off suddenly, got to his feet and abruptly went through the French windows into the apartment.

The next morning June found a brief note from Anthony Spence propped up against a vase on the piano. He had taken his departure during the night. Perhaps he was right in thinking that this was the best way to avoid complicated explanations and a painful farewell. He had written:

DEAR JUNE: Going like this may seem a bit cowardly, but to explain everything takes more courage than I possess, for reasons that I feel you must know. Before I can tell you what I might be tempted to say, certain things must come to pass. Possibly they never will, but I have taken an oath over poor Joe's grave to see that justice is done. No matter the cost I could never rest until the scales are made to balance.

This note is for you. I am leaving another for your brother.

TONY.

Because she loved him, June Wallace understood, and, too, because she loved him, her heart went cold with terror. Tony had written "justice," but, failing that, it was but another step to demand vengeance. Horrible possibilities quickly crowded through her mind.

"I must find him," she whispered. "I must talk to him before it's too late!"

But Anthony Spence was not to be found easily. He had left everything behind him, even his own name.

CHAPTER V.

MYSTERIOUS THREATS.

VIEWS from any mental angle, it was but natural that Thomas Karch should move as quickly as possible from the apartment where there were constant reminders of his wife's tragic death. Even a man with but sorrow in his heart and nothing on his conscience would have welcomed escape. It was the normal thing to do.

Conscience? One might well wonder if Tom Karch had a conscience. Ghostly and calculating as his double crime had been, he presented to the world an unharried countenance which certainly gave no hint of a gnawing guilt within. The only noticeable change in his habits—not noticeable enough to stir comment—was that he drank more heavily than usual. It was at night that he stupefied his senses with liquor, and not even his servant was a witness to these excesses.

Karch's new living quarters furnished him with an address which he considered more in keeping with the station in life to which he had elevated himself. A man living alone, one might think, could have done with less room, but the forced sale of a house, furnishings included, had offered him the opportunity of a luxurious home with no great investment above the mortgage and the prospect of it bringing a profit as an apartment-house site.

He expected, also, to marry again. Not too soon, of course, for that might give rise to unpleasant talk. The woman for whom his infatuation had been the motivation of his crime was agreeable to becoming Mrs. Karch—eager, as well as agreeable—for Karch, quite in contrast with his former domestic niggardliness, promised to be a generous and indulgent husband.

The number of Karch's house was 86. Two doors below, at No. 90, was another stone-fronted building with a

high stoop which had been divided into three apartments, one to a floor. That directly beneath the roof was called a studio. It had a skylight and was particularly suited to the requirements of an artist.

Artists, perhaps, are conceded the right to have peculiarities, but the conduct of the man who occupied the top floor of No. 90 was most puzzling, even for an artist, granting that he was one.

The hour was two o'clock in the morning. He folded up a sheet of paper on which he had been writing, put it in an envelope, sealing the flap with a heavy splash of letter wax. This alone might not have been so peculiar, but he now used the wax again, melting it in such a way that upon the seal was superimposed a miniature steeple effect, so that it looked not unlike a carpet tack sticking point up from the envelope.

Next he took a considerable length of stout fishing cord, weighted near the end with a heavy sinker, and, fraying the end of the string a little, fixed it into the apex of the peculiar seal. This done to his apparent satisfaction, he put the letter and the attached string carefully into a small box, packed it with a bit of cotton to prevent jarring about, and slipped it into the pocket of his coat. He was fully dressed.

Placing a table beneath the skylight and a chair on top of the table, he climbed up, opened the center frame which was hinged for purposes of ventilation, and drew himself through. Only an athletic man could have managed it with such ease.

A moment later he was on the roof, moving carefully lest he come in collision with the wires of radio aërials strung about, for there was not enough light to see them clearly. There was no break between the houses, although the roof of No. 86 was some five feet higher than that of its westward neighbor. This, however, offered no diffi-

culty, and the man of these mysterious activities vaulted like an acrobat, landing lightly on the balls of his feet.

He appeared to know precisely what he was doing. Going to the front of the building, he leaned over the coping and stared down, shifted his position the matter of some inches to the left so that he was directly above the open center window of the second floor. He took the box out of his pocket, and the weighted cord with the envelope suspended from the end was gently lowered until it was level with that particular window.

The man's arm began to move in a swaying motion so that the weight swung back and forth like a pendulum. A peculiar occupation, certainly, for two o'clock in the morning! The arc of the fluttering bit of white widened until the envelope had swung within the room. He gave the cord more play. The momentum would carry the weight well within the chamber. Catching up the slack, he gave the string a sharp, quick twist and began to haul in.

"Good!" he murmured. "You'll be a much puzzled man, Tom Karch, trying to figure out how that got inside your room!"

The envelope was no longer fastened to the end of the cord, for just as Anthony Spence had calculated, the slender point of wax had broken off, leaving his communication within.

Unless one could know what was going on in Tony's mind, all this elaborate business might have made one think that he had lost his sanity. What purpose was it to serve?

The room of the open window was Karch's bedchamber. The man slept heavily with two stiff drinks of whisky for his nightcap. His bed was not far from the opening. Not unlike a sailing bird, Tony Spence's missive slid into the room and, carried on by the momentum of the lead weight, finally came to a rest. The tug of the cord, snapping

the slender wax neck, stirred it slightly, and then there it lay waiting to be found when Karch awoke.

It was about eight o'clock when the man opened his eyes and groaned with the throb of a dull headache. His mouth was dry, his tongue sour. He tossed back the covers without seeing the envelope, which was flung across the floor, falling in such a position that it looked as though it might have been slid beneath the door from the hall outside.

Karch did not see it until he had finished dressing.

"Now where did that come from?" he growled as he turned the envelope over in his hand. It was addressed, in a penmanship obviously masculine, "Mr. Karch," and the wax seal gave it an atmosphere of both privacy and importance. He broke the seal and, as he began to read, the expression on his heavy face, usually registering no expression at all, was that of a man stunned by an unexpected blow, and then there leaped into his eyes a light that there could be no mistaking. It was fear.

For the murder of two persons, your wife and the man who paid the penalty of your crime, you have escaped the law, but you cannot escape justice. I am justice and you cannot escape me.

I could have killed you to-night as you slept—the way you killed your wife as she slept. But you shall have the death that you have earned, the death of the murderer. You shall know what it means to count the hours of life, to feel the presence of death coming closer and knowing that you cannot escape it.

I am not a murderer, but an executioner. You are to die at: Joe Spence died in the gray dawn of the morning, and the date of your execution—mark it well, Karch—is Tuesday, the twelfth day of October. May God have mercy on your soul!

Tom Karch flung that awful sheet of paper from him and staggered back with terror-bulging eyes. His knees

collapsed beneath his weight and he sank weakly to the edge of the bed. It was guilt that made him so poignantly afraid. Cold sweat burst out all over his body and for a full minute or two fear held him in the grip of a helpless paralysis. Strangely enough, it was the last sentence of the letter that beat through his brain. "May God have mercy on your soul!" It had the sound of finality, like a judge pronouncing sentence in the hushed stillness of the courtroom.

Presently, however, he mastered his panic to a considerable degree, trying to convince himself that the threat was not to be accepted for what it said. He sought refuge in derision.

"Pah!" he snorted, but not with the full confidence he should have liked to feel. "It's the old barking-dog stuff. 'Barking dogs never bite.' Could have killed me last night, huh? Well, why didn't he? Bunk, that's what it is. Wouldn't give me a chance to protect myself if he meant business. Some crazy coot who'll probably be locked up in an observation ward before——"

He glanced at the desk calendar in its silver frame across the room. Until Tuesday, the twelfth, it was a week and one day. The date leaped out at him in red, as though it were a portent. Tom Karch shivered and then laughed weakly, remembering that the twelfth of October is Columbus Day.

Karch got a still better grip upon himself and picked the letter from the floor where he had flung it.

"Better not leave it lying around," he grunted and reached for a match to burn it. The thought of having it in his pocket was unpleasant. Suddenly a question popped into his mind. How had that letter got into his room? The position in which he had found it indicated that it had been slipped beneath the door. Probably it had been handed to Kato, his combination cook, butler and valet, at a late hour, or an early

one, and Kato had brought it upstairs. He'd ask the little Jap about that. He burned the disturbing note but saved the envelope and slipped it into his pocket.

By the time he got downstairs, Tom Karch was able to look and act normally. He sat down at the breakfast table and tapped the bell. Kato, always smiling, appeared with a glass of orange juice on a silver tray.

"Good morning!" he chirped. "Another day has come full of splendiddness and great pulchritude. I trust my esteemed master——"

There were occasions when Karch got a good laugh out of Kato's struggles to improve his English vocabulary, but this was not one of them. He glowered and the little Jap, sensing his employer's displeasure, became instantly solemn.

Karch took the envelope from his pocket and put it on the table.

"Who gave you that, Kato?" he demanded.

The little Jap's face was blank but, for that matter, it always was.

"Pardon me for giving dispute to my master's positive intonation of voice," he said, "but it is a mistake."

Karch's eyes snapped angrily. "Don't lie to me, you yellow-faced pygmy!" he thundered. "I found this on the floor of my room this morning where it had been shoved under the door. Where you shoved it under the door, of course. There's nobody in the house but you and me. You're smart enough to understand——"

"With humbleness and profusion of apology I make haste to insist that my master makes an error."

"Oh, come off, Kato. No harm's done. Maybe from the way I spoke you got the notion that I had some reason to be sore at you, but that's not the case at all. I'm only anxious to have you tell me how this note was delivered and get a description of the man who left it."

Naturally, knowing nothing whatever about it, Kato stuck to his denial that he had ever seen the envelope before this moment. No amount of persuasion could budge him, and Karch was on a fence of anxiety. He couldn't make up his mind if the little Jap were telling the truth or not. Still he could not conceive any reasonable ground for the suspicion that Kato was lying.

If Kato were telling the truth, thought Tom Karch with a fresh tingle of fear, it could mean but one thing—the man who had written that note had himself been inside the house that night!

"I could have killed you to-night as you slept." He remembered reading that. Perhaps it was true!

Leaving his breakfast unfinished, he began rushing through the house for evidence that Kato had been careless about locking the doors. In the basement he made the discovery that one of the windows was unfastened, but he could not very well blame his servant for this, since the catch was missing and evidently had been gone some time. He'd have a good man from his own contracting force go over the house, taking every possible precaution. New locks throughout, one of those new burglar-proof bolts for each of the doors. Yes, and one for his own bedroom. The fewer the chances he took the safer.

Returning to the first floor he impressed upon Kato that great caution must be exercised about admitting people. No strangers whatever must get past the entrance. He sized up the Jap's diminutive size with a doubtful frown.

"I guess I ought to get you a gun, Kato," he said thoughtfully. "You wouldn't stand much of a chance in a fight—if it should come to that."

"Jujutsu is best for us Japanese," responded Kato with a smile and an expressive movement of his quick, lithe

body. "As you say in United States, 'The bigger they are the more hard they tumble.' Against jujutsu, esteemed master, the gun is nix."

That night Tom Karch doubled his bedtime dose of whisky and, after a good deal of tossing, finally fell asleep behind the protection of a heavy lock bolt that had been put on his bedroom door during the afternoon and which operated only from the inside. "Nothing less than an ax could batter past that barrier now."

He spent a wretched night, his sleep haunted by agonizing nightmares. The red "12" took on life, walked out of its allotted square on the October leaf of the calendar and began marching toward him, getting closer and closer. Behind the numbers walked Martha, his murdered wife, fat, ponderous, staring him straight in the eye. Beside her was Joe Spence—Joe Spence as Karch had seen the boy that night in the apartment, haggard, hollow-eyed, gaunt and ragged. And walking besides these two was Death, a skeleton in black gown and hood. They were chanting something in unison, words that fell low and mournful from their mouths. Even the fleshless skull joined in the dirge. They were saying, "And may God have mercy on your soul."

Fear had done this to his subconscious mind, a great fear which had grown from the seed of that letter. Karch awoke with his body bathed in cold perspiration. For a moment wakefulness intensified the nightmare, for the gray light of dawn was breaking. That was the time set by the threat for him to pay the penalty that the law had permitted him to escape. He leaped to his feet, trembling, and reached for a steadying drink from the decanter.

A strangled cry burst from his throat. His fingers lost their grip about the neck of the bottle and it crashed to the floor.

"Another one!" he whispered thickly. "Another of those letters. It can't be—it's impossible!"

But there could be no mistake. A second envelope, duplicate of the first, with the seal of red wax staining the heavy white paper, lay on the floor near his bed.

With a palsied hand he picked it up, forced himself to break open the flap, and read:

At dawn, Tuesday, October twelfth. And may God have mercy on your soul!

With an unsteady, staggering motion, Tom Karch took a step toward the wall, turned on the lights, and examined the new bolt he had locked himself in with. The fastening was intact as, of course, it had to be. In a benumbed way he tried to understand how this second letter could have got inside the room, but mystery baffled efforts at explanation.

The spot where he had found the envelope was too far from the door for there to be entertained any notion that it had been slid through from the hall. Still he investigated and found the space too narrow for it to be possible.

As a belated thought, Karch rushed to the open window and stared into the street below. It was absurd, he decided, to presume that the envelope had come through the window. He shuddered with that instinctive dread which human nature has of happenings that baffle normal and logical explanation.

He thought of Kato, the little Jap.

"They're a sly lot, those Orientals," he muttered, "I'll keep my eyes on him, and if I catch him putting over tricks on me——"

The whisky decanter had not broken when it slipped out of his hand. Karch picked it up, steadied himself with a long drink and, it being three hours

earlier than his usual rising time, he went back to bed.

Under other circumstances, no doubt, Karch would have turned the matter over to the police, but for very excellent reasons he shrank from this course. He certainly had no intention of risking that! It might be his luck to have some detective of unusual alertness assigned to the case, with unpleasant consequences resulting. So far as the police records were concerned, the murder of Mrs. Karch was solved and closed. Better let sleeping dogs lie.

Some hours later Karch went downtown to his office, riding on the subway as usual. He looked haggard and harassed, but the occupation of business affairs relieved the tension to some extent and he returned home that evening with his nerves under somewhat better control. He had closed a contract for a big building job that promised a nice, fat profit.

That night there was a storm with a heavy rain driven by a high wind, and Karch slept with his bedroom window open only two or three inches above the sash. The result was that he awoke the third morning without there being another of those envelopes to increase his panic. Even had the window been open, however, the gusts of wind would have prevented Anthony Spence from working his little trick with the weighted length of cord and the sealing wax.

But the respite was brief. As he was finishing breakfast, Kato called him to the telephone.

"Hello!" he said gruffly into the transmitter. "This is Karch speaking."

The voice that answered him was faint, little more than a ghostly whisper.

"Tuesday, the twelfth," said the voice, "at dawn." And that was all.

Karch's cheeks blanched, the receiver trembled in his hand, but he got a grip

on himself and began jiggling the hook in a frenzy of haste.

"Operator!" he bawled. "Quick, trace that call for me. Where did it come from? It's important! Important, I tell you!"

After a maddening wait the operator reported that he must be mistaken. No call, she said, had been made through his telephone.

"Stupid fools!" gritted Karch and banged the receiver on the hook. He began pacing the floor.

"Got to protect myself," he muttered. "Got to do something to stop this business." Again he thought of the police and that led to something else.

"Of course!" he exclaimed. "That's the thing to do. Private agency." He remembered the name of an investigating service he had employed a year or more ago in a business matter. He referred to the telephone directory, found the number and called it. After considerable delay he finally had a connection.

"Kilrain Detective Agency?"

"Yes, this is the Kilrain Agency," answered a woman's voice.

"Let me have Mr. Kilrain."

"Mr. Kilrain is out of town, but Mr. Jeffery——"

"All right," Tom Karch broke in impatiently, "put Jeffery on the wire."

There was a brief interval, a metallic sound that led Karch to believe for a moment that the connection had been broken, and then a deep-pitched, growling, "Yes, yes! What is it, please."

"This is Thomas Karch, Mr. Jeffery. Your agency handled a matter for me some time ago and entirely to my satisfaction. I need the services of a good operative at once, and so——"

"What is the nature of the case, Mr. Karch?"

"I have been getting some threatening letters."

"Blackmail, eh?"

"Threats of—of violence. As a precaution I think it best——"

"I'll send a man over to you immediately," broke in Mr. Jeffery. "Your office, I suppose?"

"He'd better come to my house. These letters have both been delivered to my home. It's very mysterious, very——"

The voice at the other end of the wire broke in to inquire the address, promised that an operative—one of the best of the Kilrain staff—would call within an hour, and brought the conversation to an abrupt close.

Karch turned away from the telephone with a feeling of great relief, regretting that he had not taken this action in the beginning.

CHAPTER VI.

MR. LASSITER TAKES THE CASE.

AN hour and ten minutes later a tall man in square-toed shoes, blue suit and derby hat, went up the stoop of No. 86 and rang the bell. Karch's little Jap opened the door, with caution.

"You will please state your identity," said Kato.

With a grunt the caller plunged his hand into his pocket and produced a card which proclaimed, "George Lassiter, Kilrain Detective Agency." "Give that to Mr. Karch," he said. "I'm expected."

The little Jap examined the card swiftly and released the safety chain, permitting the detective to enter.

"Not taking any chances, I see," observed the latter with the suggestion of a smile as Karch stepped out of the library into the hall. "I'm Lassiter—Kilrain Agency."

Considerably to Karch's annoyance and discomfiture, the other took two sticks of chewing gum from his pocket, peeled off the wrappers, and began a vigorous and by no means noiseless mastication. Karch thought of his dead

wife. She had chewed gum with a similar vulgar abandon.

He gave Lassiter a swift stare of appraisal. "Looks like an intelligent fellow," he thought. "Must be a good man or the Kilrain people wouldn't have sent him."

"You've been getting threatening letters, I understand," said the detective when Karch had taken him into the library. "That's why I'm the man on the job. Sort of my specialty, you know. We've all got our particular line."

Karch nodded and offered him a cigar, hoping that it would put an end to the gum chewing. Karch took one for himself, and bit off the tip with his teeth.

"Yes, Lassiter, that's it. I've been getting letters threatening my life. Two letters mysteriously appearing in my bedroom while I slept, and a telephone call this morning. It may be the work of some harmless lunatic, but I thought it best——"

"A lunatic is never harmless until he's under lock and key," broke in the detective, popping his gum between his teeth and looking keenly interested.

"Let's see the letters and tell me the facts—all of 'em."

"I haven't the letters," Karch said. "I'm sorry, but I burned them."

He was not disposed to complete frankness. He didn't see any necessity of connecting the letters with the murder of his wife and the execution of Joe Spence for the crime. He didn't want to talk about that nor even to think about it.

"Putting it in a nutshell," Lassiter summed up crisply, "you received two letters—unfortunately destroyed—and a telephone call, threatening to kill you next Tuesday morning. You don't know who wrote the letters, you don't know how they got inside the house, and you didn't recognize the voice on the phone."

"I know it's the work of a crazy man," Karch responded. "Nobody in his right senses would do such a thing."

"You'd better let me have a complete list of your enemies."

"I haven't got any."

"Sure of that?"

"Absolutely!"

"Queer case," observed the detective, popping his gum again. "Harder to get at the bottom of this business when we can't supply a motive. Now how do *you* suppose those letters got into your bedroom?"

"I'm paying you to find that out!"

"Yes, that's true." Lassiter looked meditative for a moment and then, "This Jap you've got working for you—how long have you had him, and what do you know about him?"

"Hired Kato through an employment agency. They said he was all right, but that's all I know. He didn't write the letters, that much is sure. In the first place it wasn't his handwriting and, on top of that, he can't compose a good English sentence. Besides, what would he be doing it for—a joke?"

"Orientals don't go in for jokes," answered the detective. "I'll keep my eye on little 'Slant Eyes.'"

Karch smoked nervously. "Perhaps—h'm!—perhaps I'd better discharge him. If there's any possibility——"

"Fire the Jap? Not on your life! If he's got a hand in this business we want to nab him with the goods."

"Sh! Not so loud! He might hear you." Karch gulped and tried to laugh, without much success. "It's got me upset, badly upset, Lassiter, but I can't believe there's any real danger. Men who are going to murder people don't send letters in advance naming the date, almost the hour, in their own handwriting."

"There's no accounting for insanity, Mr. Karch, but don't worry. I'm on the job now."

It was evident that the detective had

complete confidence in himself, but Tom Karch could not shake off the persistent feeling of danger. He strode back and forth, chewing the end of his cigar to a ragged pulp.

"It might be safer for me to slip out of town for a few days—until after Tuesday," he suggested.

"What!" cried Lassiter, aghast. "Come, man, come! Use your head. If there's any actual danger you'll never be safe until this fellow—a lunatic, let us say—is put where he belongs. Oh, sure, you could hide yourself until after Tuesday, but what about later? You look as if you'd been losing a lot of sleep over it already. You don't want to have a thing like this hanging over your head."

"Yes, I suppose you're right. I'll put myself entirely in your hands, Lassiter."

"Now that's the way to talk!" the detective exclaimed warmly as he got to his feet. "Suppose you take me upstairs and we'll see if we can figure out the mystery of those letters."

Karch led the way to the second floor and, reaching his sleeping chamber, explained in answer to Lassiter's questions where each of the two envelopes had been found. The latter considered the problem, but it did not occur to him, apparently, that the envelopes might have come through the window.

"I see you're a restless sleeper," he said finally, pointing to the tumbled bedclothes. "It occurs to me that if the second of those envelopes had been slipped between the blankets in the right position there was a pretty good chance of it being knocked out on the floor during the night. How's that for a theory?"

"Kato would be the only person who had a chance to do anything like that!" blurted Karch. "I want that Jap out of this house!"

"You leave everything to me," Lassiter insisted firmly. "If little Slant Eyes

has got a hand in this we want to know it. Let him stay on."

"He—he's my cook. He could, he might——"

"Put poison in your soup," finished Lassiter, but apparently the suggestion was not offered with much seriousness. "Don't worry, Karch. I'm here to see that nothing like that happens."

It was on Thursday that Lassiter took charge as Karch's detective and protector, and while he did not make any headway with the solution of the mystery, his presence did put a stop to the letters and the telephone calls. Karch likely should have been grateful for this much, but the truth of the matter is that, try as he might, he could not shake off the grip of his fear. Nor did heavy drinking help the condition of his nerves. It gave him temporary stupefaction but demanded its price in reaction. As Tuesday drew nearer, his nights continued to be filled with hideous nightmares and he was always seeing a crimson "12" dancing in front of his eyes.

At last Monday morning came. A few more hours and—what? He was fighting desperately to keep himself from going to pieces, and tried to tell himself that nothing could possibly happen with every window and door in the house securely locked, and an armed bodyguard to give him further protection. Lassiter, it seemed, was still undecided about Kato.

"The trouble with these Japs," he would complain, "is that a white man can never figure out what is going on inside their heads. Of course we know it wasn't Kato that telephoned, but he's the only answer either of us can find for the letters."

Business that could not be put off forced Karch to go downtown. The detective accompanied him, and Karch, afraid to touch any more of Kato's food, insisted on having an early dinner downtown, a precaution that Lassiter

did not discourage. They returned home on the subway a little after six and had no more than got inside the house—the little Jap having admitted them—when the detective turned swiftly at a hoarse cry from the other.

Karch, his face gone white and mottled, was holding an envelope in his palsied hand.

"Another one!" he croaked. "The same kind of an envelope as the others!"

"Where did you find that?" Lassiter demanded, taking a leaping step across the room.

"It—it was in my pocket! I just found it in my pocket!"

"You'd better open it," said the detective.

Karch hesitated and then tore loose the flap, sealed with red wax. There dropped out of the envelope into his hand an October sheet that had been torn from a small calendar, with a black circle drawn about the date of Tuesday, the twelfth, and that was all.

"In my pocket!" groaned Karch. "It was in my pocket! How did it get in my pocket?"

"Very simply explained, I think," Lassiter responded with no great excitement. "It could have happened in one of two ways. Either in the crowded subway, or——"

"A fine detective, you are!" shouted Karch. "The man who threatened to kill me—to kill me to-night—got close enough to have driven a knife into my ribs—he could have done that just as easily—and you didn't see him."

"Or," pursued Lassiter, "Kato could have done it as he let us in the door just now. They're quick with their hands, those Japs. Yes, I think that's most likely it."

"Then do something about it!" yelled Tom Karch. "What am I paying you for, you blockhead?"

"Take it easy, Mr. Karch, take it easy. I'll handle little Kato and, take

it from me, I'll handle him rough. That'll be the only way to get anything out of him. No use questioning him like you would an ordinary suspect for you can never tell from their faces if they're lying. It's time to have a show-down with little Slant Eyes."

"You'd better watch your step," Karch told him heavily. "Like all of 'em he knows how to take care of himself. Jujutsu, y'know."

The detective gave a laugh of derision.

"He won't be quite so expert at it with the nippers on his wrists," he retorted. "I'll grab him from behind when he's not looking; presto! the handcuffs snap and then I'll start in working on him. He'll wish he was back in Tokyo or where he comes from."

Karch had talked loudly and Lassiter had been even less guarded in the tone of his voice with the result that the plan was never carried out, for on the other side of the library door little Kato was doing a bit of eavesdropping. As the Oriental listened his impassive features seemed actually to register expression and his almond eyes were opened much wider than usual in evident bewilderment and consternation.

"A very strange situation," said Kato to himself, thinking in his native tongue. "Kato cannot understand precisely what it's all about, but the voice of wisdom tells Kato he should direct his feet to other places quickly. These American people are indeed most strange creatures."

Whereupon the little Jap slipped quietly to the rear of the house, climbed the back stairs, gathered his personal belongings in considerable haste and took his stealthy departure by way of the basement. In lieu of two weeks' salary due him, the matter of some forty-five dollars, he took half a dozen pieces of silver which no doubt gave him his wages and a little something to spare.

CHAPTER VII.

SUSPENSE.

IT was some time later before Kato's precipitate departure was discovered.

"He's gone and that settles it!" blurted Karch as he collapsed into a chair and mopped his perspiring brow. "You were right, Lassiter, I've got to give you credit for that. You hit the nail right on the head the first guess you made—the first day you were here, I mean. But I can't for the life of me figure out what kind of a game he was trying to play."

"You seem to be glad he got away from us," said the detective.

"I think what I'm to be glad of is that *I* got away from *him*!" exploded Karch. "Either he was going to kill me or—oh, let's not talk about it." He gave a shiver and gestured in the direction of a cabinet across the room. "Let's have a drink, Lassiter!"

The detective obligingly produced a decanter but brought along only one glass, explaining that he seldom indulged.

"Besides," he added, "the night's not yet over and I'd better keep a clear head."

Karch quivered. "You—you mean you think there's still a chance?"

"The night's not over yet," the other repeated and no further than that did he seem disposed to commit himself. Karch, however, wouldn't let him off with any such vague statements.

"But what could happen now, Lassiter? Kato's gone, there's only you and me, and the house is locked up like the vault of a bank. I ask you, what *could* happen?"

The detective reached across the table and helped himself to one of Karch's cigars. He lighted it and relaxed in his chair.

"It's a pretty broad question, asking a man what *can* happen, Karch. A lot of things can happen in this world of

ours, things sometimes that seem utterly impossible."

"Don't—don't talk like that," Karch begged, and lifting the brimming liquor glass to his lips some of it splashed over his fingers. "Just when I begin to feel my life is safe, you intimate that it isn't. Can't you be more cheerful?"

Lassiter, smoking slowly, tapped off the ashes neatly into a tray and did not respond for a moment.

"You've insisted upon trying to keep me in the dark, haven't begun to tell me the truth about this business," he said. "Therefore, it's difficult——"

"What do you mean by that?" broke in Karch, his head jerking up defensively.

The detective shrugged his shoulders. "I suppose you think it's strictly your own affair, but you know why they're after you, all right. I think I know, too. I'm not exactly stupid, you know."

"Confound you, what do you mean?" rasped Karch, his eyes unable to meet the other's cool, steady gaze.

"I read the newspapers and I remember what I read. The trial of Joe Spence interested me particularly."

Karch quivered. Did Lassiter suspect the truth? Was that what the man hinted at?

"Joe Spence has a brother, you know, and he's the man that's after you, Karch. Not the least doubt about that."

"A brother? I—I didn't know——"

"You didn't know there was a brother? Humph! You must have taken singular pains to avoid the newspaper accounts of Spence's execution. Yes, there was a brother. He returned from abroad the morning before Joe Spence died in the chair—just in time for the last farewells.

"But I see the subject is distasteful to you, and evidently you'd rather not talk about it."

"Why didn't you tell me this before?" Karch cried thickly, his shaking

hands reaching for the whisky decanter again. "That man will pursue me until——until——"

Karch gulped down the whisky in one choking swallow. "You—you'd better go through the house again, Lassiter, and make sure everything is tight. Make absolutely sure! My life is in your hands, Lassiter, entirely in your hands!"

"Yes," agreed the detective, "so it is."

He made a trip through all the rooms, probably for no other purpose than to satisfy Karch, returning some minutes later to report cheerfully that every thing was "tight as a drum."

Tom Karch had no intention of going to bed that night. Sleep was impossible and the greatest safety was promised by keeping himself under the watchful eye of his armed bodyguard. He drank heavily from the decanter, his words became thick and fragmentary. Presently the alcoholic fumes mounted to his brain and stupefied him to a heavy, intoxicated slumber. His body slipped so low in the chair that he was almost bent double. His arms dangled limply toward the floor, his face was blotched and swollen.

There was no sound within the library, except his heavy breathing and the solemn ticking of a clock which now marked the hour of half past ten. An hour and a half until midnight. With the last stroke of twelve it would be the twelfth of October.

The face of Lassiter, the detective, underwent a change, like a mask suddenly lowered. He was no longer impassive. His eyes burned hot and a smile of exultation in which there was no humor, only grim victory, moved his lips.

"Not much longer!" he whispered. "It's not much longer now!"

He got to his feet and went to the window. The air within the room was foul with tobacco and the odor of liquor. He unfastened the catch and

raised the sash to admit fresh air, thrust out his head for a moment to cleanse his lungs.

There were a number of cars in the street. Some sort of an affair was in progress at one of the neighboring houses. People were coming out and getting into their machines, but the man at the window was occupied with his own thoughts and took no conscious notice. Presently he lowered the sash, fastened the catch, drew down the shade, and walked slowly across the room.

"Soon now—soon!" he said aloud. "I wonder that I've been able to hold myself in this long!"

To his sudden consternation, the silence of the house was broken by the ringing of the door bell, a jangling, insistent clatter. He was disposed not to respond but the ringing persisted. This was a caller who refused to be put off. Lassiter hesitated, shot a swift glance at Karch who stirred heavily as though the sounds were about to awaken him.

"I suppose I'd better see who it is," he decided, and went toward the hall. Swinging open the door, which was of solid wood and preventing him from determining beforehand what sort of person the caller might be, he saw that it was a woman. Instantly she pressed across the threshold.

"Tony!" she whispered, lifting a strained face and a pair of fear-filled eyes to his. "Tony!"

Anthony Spence, masquerading as a detective under the name of Lassiter, drew back in startled, almost incredulous amazement. For a moment he could only gape at her, dazed and speechless.

"June! You—here?" he finally managed to say.

"Tony!" Her voice was trembling with dread. "Have—have I come too late?" She pressed close to him, trying to read the answer in his face.

Anthony Spence blocked her path. "You can't come in, June," he told her hastily. "I can't explain, but——"

"Then I'm too late!" she moaned. "Oh, Tony—poor, mad Tony! I've been looking for you all the time, praying I wouldn't be too late to prevent you from——"

"I know what you think, June, but you're wrong. Everything's all right, quite all right."

"How *can* everything be all right with you here in Karch's house? Why are you here unless——"

"Don't question me, June," he pleaded. "Nothing has happened. I promise you that nothing like you think is going to happen."

One of her trembling hands caught at his sleeve.

"Come away, Tony," she begged in desperate earnestness. "You don't realize what you're doing. It's madness, Tony, madness!"

"You don't know what you're asking, June, for you don't understand. You're asking the impossible. Go, June, and leave it to my word of honor——"

"Oh, Tony, I can't. You must see that I can't." Almost by physical force she got farther into the vestibule. "If you won't leave, then neither will I."

Anthony Spence knew that she meant exactly what she said. She feared the thing that had tempted him until sanity had come to his rescue and pointed out a better way. Abruptly he closed the door with June inside and faced her in the dim light.

"Where is he—Karch?" she breathed anxiously, not certain if she could believe what he had told her.

"If you love justice," he pleaded with her, "let me go through with this. It's to-night or never, June. He's in there—in the library. It's all right if we talk quietly. He's drunk, dead drunk, and it's luck that you didn't wake him up with your ringing just now."

"I'll tell you everything there is to know. I've been here with him for a week so you might know I've had plenty of chances to finish him. Heaven knows I've been tempted. It's been hard to keep my fingers off his throat, but I've kept myself under control."

"You've been in the same house with Thomas Karch and he hasn't suspected——"

"He thinks I am a private detective. He knows me by the name of Lassiter."

"How could you ever have managed?" June asked gaspingly. "Tell me, Tony!"

"When I left your apartment," Spence told her, "I had but one thought in mind. Karch had to pay! If I could have got my hands on him, if I could have got within firing distance of him those first few days, I should have killed him, but I began to use my head. Mere death was too easy for him; I wanted to make him suffer as my poor brother suffered. I decided not to kill him, but to scare him into confession and send him to the chair."

"Standing across the street one afternoon, watching Karch's house here, I got the glimmer of this idea, although I never dreamed that the cards would fall into my hands as they have."

"Two doors from here there was a house with the top floor for rent—an apartment with a skylight and I could see from the sidewalk that it was accessible to the roof. I rented it and the first thing I did was to tap Karch's telephone line."

"You see, June," he went on, speaking so low that she had to strain her ears to catch the words, "I saw that Karch's nerve must be broken before I could do what I'd set out to do. I planned to get under his skin with a series of warning letters. Nothing disturbs a man so much as the things that can't be explained. I could have dropped 'em in his letter box, I could have sent them to his house by mes-

senger, but that was too ordinary. Even that would have worried him, but it wouldn't worry him enough."

"Finally, June, I figured out a way of getting them into his bedroom by way of the roof. I'd noticed by watching from the street that he slept with the window open. So with a little scheme I figured out——"

With no more words than were necessary, he explained the device of the cord and the letter wax.

"But how in the name of Heaven did you get inside his house?" she broke in.

"I'd contemplated managing it by coming down from the roof with a rope ladder, and cutting the glass of the window if it happened to be closed. But fate made it easier than that. Justice was on my side. A week ago I didn't believe there could be such a thing as justice!"

"With a little electrical tinkering I was able to ring Karch's telephone from my apartment two doors away. That would worry him more, you see, than if he was able to trace the call to some corner drug store. The mystery of a call coming from nowhere—it was all a part of my plan to tear down his nerve, the only way I could be sure of him breaking when it came to the pinch."

"Immediately after I called him and whispered 'At dawn, Tuesday, the twelfth,' he did the natural, obvious thing, but it didn't occur to me that he might. It almost upset everything. He called a private detective agency. He got his number and in another half minute he'd have been talking to the manager of the agency when I saw that I had my chance. I cut him off from the main line, came in on the wire, disguised my voice best I could, and carried on the conversation."

"The rest of it was easy. I rushed to a printing office around the corner, had 'em do a quick card job for me, for I thought that would make it look

better, and an hour after I'd talked to Karch, here I was as Lassiter, the detective."

"It hardly seems possible, Tony—it's all like an amazing story!"

"No more amazing, I assure you, than answering the ring of the door bell and finding you on the stoop. I couldn't believe my own eyes. How could you know——"

"I told you I had been looking for you. It was hard to find a trace at first, but you know I have done investigating for my brother, and—and I was anxious to know where you were. At last I learned that you had rented an apartment down the street, but I was never able to find you in, though I tried frequently. So I started to watch the place all the time, almost across the street from here, and when some one put his head out the window of this house, I looked—and it was you! I ran over, and then I saw Karch's name on the doorplate——"

Her voice had risen and he cautioned her with a whispered warning as he took a step back and looked into the library. There was, however, no evidence that Karch had stirred from his stupor.

"What is the rest of your plan?" June demanded. "What are you going to do now?"

In little more than a sentence he told her, promising there would be no violence.

"You must let me stay," she begged him. "Don't you see, Tony, my being here will not interfere at all, and I couldn't stand the agony of uncertainty, not knowing what was happening. You might——"

She was very close. Anthony's arm went about her.

"June, dear," he said, "it has been the thought of you, the chance that perhaps if I could wipe off the stain——"

"There is no perhaps about it, Tony,"

she told him and lifted his face to him for their first kiss.

CHAPTER VIII.

BROKEN.

THROUGH the stillness of the house a clock struck. One, two, three, four. Thomas Karch heard it like the sounds that come to a man in a dream, vague and indistinct. He forced open one reddened eye and squinted at the clock. Yes, the hands were pointed at four o'clock, and four o'clock at this time of the year meant approaching dawn.

"Lassiter!" he shouted, leaping to his feet. "Lassiter, where are you?" Only one light was burning now in the library, leaving the rest of the big room in shadows. A figure moved in one of the chairs. "Oh, there you are, Lassitor. Have I been asleep so long?" He took an unsteady step forward and reached to the table for the decanter. "Is everything all right, Lassiter? Are you sure everything is all right? It's dawn now, man; dawn! Are you positive that nothing can happen?"

The man upon whom he depended for safety advanced to the patch of light that fell from the reading lamp on the table. He was within less than ten feet of Tom Karch before the latter saw the masked face, the glint of the revolver. A hoarse cry of terror that ended in a choking, strangling sound, and Karch took a leap backward, tripped and fell into the chair, his face working in horrible convulsions, his body shaking.

"You——"

"I am justice; I am the dealer of doom. The hour has struck, Karch—the hour has struck. It is at this hour that condemned men pay for death with death."

Anthony Spence was muffled, husky, partly through effort and partly because of the intensity of his own emotions,

but had Karch been in the normal command of his senses he must have recognized the voice as that of the man he had known as Lassiter, but he was hardly capable of thinking at all.

It was dawn, the avenger was here. He had overcome locked windows and bolted doors, he had brushed aside the armed bodyguard as though he did not exist. There was no escape. He saw the gun lifting until the muzzle looked him straight between the eyes. He flung his hands up before his face.

"Mercy!" he croaked. "In Heaven's name, mercy!"

"You expect mercy from me?"

"Give me time—give me a little time. I'm afraid to die! I'm afraid. For—for the sake of my soul, let me confess. Give me time to make my peace with God. I'm willing to pay for what I've done, but give me time! I know who you are. You're Spence. You—you're Joe Spence's brother. You want my life—for his."

The gun did not waver.

"I did it!" Karch screamed. "I killed my wife. I shot her that night. I hated her. She wouldn't let me have a divorce, but I didn't intend sending an innocent man to the chair. I—I thought he was dead. He was a burglar, I caught him in the kitchen. He was eating. I gave him a chance, but I thought he was going after a gun and—and I pulled the trigger. It wasn't until later that I knew he didn't have a gun.

"I thought he was dead—I swear it on my dying oath! Devils whispered to me that this was my chance, such a chance as I'd never get again. I went back into the bedroom and shot her. She—she woke up, called my name, and that—that's why I shot her more than once. I had to be sure she was dead before the police got there."

Anthony Spence could hardly control his voice as he put the question, "And my brother never had the gun in his hand?"

"No, he never had the gun in his hand—until after I shot him. I got it out of the dresser when I heard some one in the apartment, and while he was lying on the floor I pressed his hand on it so it would have his finger prints."

"You killed your wife because you were in love with another woman?"

"Yes."

"What is that woman's name?"

Karch told the name of the woman.

Tony Spence moved slowly across the room but kept the revolver trained on the cringing Karch.

"One move, Karch, and I'll do what my finger is aching to do—pull the trigger of this gun; but, thank Heaven! I've got you where I want you without reddening my hands." He reached for the telephone with his free hand and called a number. It was that of the nearest precinct police station, but a few blocks distant.

"Send a plain-clothes man to this house." He gave the address. "It's a case of murder." And before the startled officer at the desk could ask questions he hung up the receiver.

"That'll bring the officers on the run," he said and removed the mask from his face. "We'll let the law handle you after all, Karch. You won't cheat it twice."

Tom Karch, when he realized that the man facing him was Lassiter, could only stare stupidly.

"You——"

"Spence, alias Lassiter, yes."

Karch slumped down in his chair but, suddenly, some of his dejected resignation to his fate seemed to leave him. His mouth ceased its twitching and drew into a tight line. He uttered no further word.

A few minutes passed before a police car raced into the quiet street and ground to a stop before No. 86. A plain-clothes man and two officers in uniform leaped out and dashed up the steps of the stoop. They found the

front door not tightly closed and, without ceremony, burst into the house.

"In here, if you please, gentlemen," said Tony Spence. "This is Mr. Karch who has confessed to me——"

"It's a lie!" shouted Karch, leaping to his feet. "This man is the brother of Joe Spence, electrocuted some time ago for the murder of my wife. This man is laboring under the delusion that his brother was innocent. He believes the insane story that Joe Spence told on the witness stand and he's trying to frame me. He sent me a lot of threatening letters, got into my house under the pretense of being a detective, pointed a gun at my head and threatened to kill me unless I 'confessed' to killing my wife and framing the murder on his brother." He glared triumphantly at Anthony. "It's his word against mine and I ask you, gentlemen, who do you believe?"

The plain-clothes sergeant looked confused for a moment and then his gaze settled accusingly on Anthony.

"What have *you* got to say for yourself?" he demanded sternly.

"Considerable," Tony answered tersely. "As it happens, this situation has been anticipated. It is not my word against that of Karch. There is a witness. Miss Wallace, if you please."

Across the shadowed room the portières moved and June stepped out. Karch went ghastly but quickly recovered himself to a considerable degree.

"A witness, yes!" he shouted. "But what kind of a witness? A good frame-up never neglects to have witnesses."

The detective sergeant spun half around on his heel.

"Who are you?" he demanded gruffly. "What's your name? What's your interest in this affair?"

"My name is June Wallace, and I——"

"Ha! So that's it!" Again Tom Karch was exultant. "Wallace was the name of the lawyer who defended——"

"I am his sister," June admitted.

"You see, sergeant!" crowed Karch. "You wouldn't dare take the words of such witnesses as these. The courts have already tried the case, the guilty man has paid the penalty——"

The same portières from which June Wallace had emerged but a moment before moved again and a man stepped forth into the room, a tall, gray-haired man.

"Perhaps," he said, his voice vibrant with emotion, "I may make a witness whose credibility this man will not be so quick to attack."

"Judge Shawn!" exclaimed the detective sergeant, and Tom Karch's last desperate bravado crumbled. He reeled back as though struck by a blow.

"I came here to-night with reluctance overcome only by Miss Wallace's remarkable powers of persuasion. She was shrewd enough to foresee the situation almost exactly as it happened.

"Mr. Spence here had laid elaborate preparations to force a confession from Karch, not stopping to think how worthless it would be, even if he forced it in writing, without the support of strong witnesses. Miss Wallace's testimony would not be enough, a fact that she readily and shrewdly foresaw.

"While Karch was down here in an intoxicated slumber, she went upstairs and got me on the telephone. I admit I had no faith in it, but as I say, her powers of persuasion are difficult to resist and she talked me into coming. She even stretched the truth a little, but we can forgive her that.

"I have heard Karch's confession and while it was made under the compulsion of fear, it was the confession of a guilty man if I ever heard one. Quite as excusable, sergeant, as the third degree which, I fancy, you have used more than once.

"The law makes mistakes, judges make mistakes, juries make mistakes——sometimes." His shoulders sagged as

though suddenly borne down by a great burden. "You may remember, sergeant, that I am the judge before whom Joe Spence was tried. It was I who pronounced sentence. On a finding of murder in the first degree the bench has no choice, but at least I can make what amends I can. Sergeant, arrest that man!"

Tom Karch swayed drunkenly on his feet. Suddenly he lunged for the table and made a grab for the gun that Tony had dropped there when the police arrived.

The detective sergeant's hand raced to the holster of his own gun, but Tony flung himself forward and caught the plain-clothes man's arm.

"It's all right, sergeant! That's my gun and it's not loaded. You see, I was afraid to trust myself with Karch with a loaded gun in my hand."

And Karch, the muzzle at his temple, pulled the trigger only to have the hammer click harmlessly. He had defeated the law once but he was not to defeat it a second time, not even with the easiest way out.



FAMOUS PENOLOGIST DIES

THE recent death by heart disease at Auburn, New York, of Thomas Mott Osborne, marks the passing of one of the chief figures in the annals of American penology. During the early part of his life, Mr. Osborne was engaged chiefly in politics. It was in 1903, when he was elected mayor of Auburn that he first became interested in the penal system of the State. In the years that followed, he made an intensive study of criminology and penology as a hobby.

Finally, in 1913, he made his famous experiment of entering Sing Sing in the guise of a convict, known as "Tom Brown" so that he might be able to get first-hand, realistic knowledge of life as it was lived by the inmates of that institution.

Following his emergence from this voluntary imprisonment, he was made warden of the penitentiary and immediately set about instituting a number of reforms. He was the founder of the Welfare League, which is still in operation and is generally regarded as a beneficial institution. His humanitarian views regarding the treatment of convicts and making the penitentiary a means of reformation rather than of punishment and brutalization have won general commendation among advanced students of penology, and his admirers are legion in the ranks of those offenders who have come under his influence. During the World War, he acted as commandant at the naval prison at Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and lately was connected with the National Society for Penal Information as chairman.

The cause of prison reform had a staunch advocate in Mr. Osborne and his accomplishments in this field will long be remembered.



CRIME ISLAND

By Madeleine Sharps Buchanan

Author of "The Crimson Blade," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

IN order to secure more funds for carrying on his courtship of Anne Sheldon, young Larry Davis, timekeeper for the Sheldon & Van Canter yarn works, has added the names of five imaginary girls to the pay roll of the company, collecting the pay envelopes that come for them. One night, after returning from a dance, he receives a note signed with the name of Hester Brown, one of his imaginary girls, requesting that he meet her on Great Falls Island. Much disturbed lest his crookedness has been found out, he answers the note's summons and finds the body of a murdered girl in the vacant cottage on the island. In her purse is a slip identifying her as Hester Brown, and this Davis removes.

Much worried over possible discovery of his dishonesty, and fearing that this will lead to his implication in the crime, Davis plans to remove the names as soon as possible. In the meantime he is notified by Horton Fane, vice president of the company and a contender for Anne's hand, that he is about to be promoted. That afternoon he is asked by Evans Mathews, still a third in love with Anne, to frame an alibi for him. It seems that Mathews is afraid that his ownership of the fatal island will get him involved in the case. Davis refuses to perjure himself.

Later he receives a second note summoning him to the island to meet Agnes Bell, another of his phantom girls. He fears that there will be another murder, and is disconcerted at finding Chief of Police Malden waiting at his house to verify Mathews' alibi. Davis does not support it, and then he decides to speak to Beth Carlin, his landlady's daughter, who has knowledge of the notes Davis received, and of his late visit to the island.

CHAPTER XII.

THE ASH TRAY.

WHEN Larry descended the stairs Beth Carlin was setting the supper table. She looked up with a radiant smile when he appeared in the door.

"Well, are you arrested?" she asked.

"I—I want to tell you something," said Larry, glancing about. "Is there any one who is likely to hear us?"

"No. Why the stealthy step and the hoarse whisper?"

Larry came close to the girl and laid his hand on her arm. He had an intense desire to penetrate beyond the hard, crisp gayety that incased her like a shell.

"Miss Carlin, I appreciate what you've done for me," he began nervously. "And I—I don't know what you think of me."

"That's nothing," said Beth brightly.

"Do be serious," pleaded Larry. "You know, of course, that I took your boat out last Saturday night. You told me that. A paddle stood wrong way up, or something."

"Right," nodded Beth, her velvet eyes on his with a mocking light deep inside of them. "I know you were out and I know you got a note from—er—your tailor, because I gave it to you myself. Now what?"

"This," said Larry with sudden force, "I had nothing to do with the murder of that girl they found on Great Falls Island! I want to tell you that and I want you to believe me."

"Good gravy!" gasped Beth. "Of course I believe you! Did you think——"

"You would be pardoned for thinking it," smiled Larry grimly. "I just wanted to give you my solemn word of honor and all the rest of it, that I never saw that girl, that I do not know her. That the crime on the island was a horrible surprise to me as it was to every one else."

"I believe you," nodded Beth brightly. "But it would go hard with you if the town knew what I know. That's why I'm keeping quiet about what I know. No use talking when it would get an innocent person in trouble. Wouldn't Malden eat it up if he knew about the note so mysteriously left on our porch, and that the moment after I gave it to you, you went out in my boat? Well, say! And I guess Sam would throw a fit to get hold of that!"

Larry's face darkened.

"Why are you doing this for me?" he asked.

"I told you," shrugged Beth. "I know you didn't kill that girl and I don't believe you knew her. So I'm mum. But I know you went to the island all right. Anyhow, my canoe did."

Larry put his hand on the edge of the supper table.

"What!" he gasped.

"Yes," said Beth calmly. "I never knew I had the slightest detective ability. But finding that paddle upside down, like you left it once before, and putting that fact with the others we have already spoken of, encouraged me. I went further. I knew Malden would try to find out what boats had gone to the island that night and so, in my desire to keep myself and my little canoe out of the matter, I just had a close look at it. And I had to wash the bow—the whole curve of it. It was caked with that queer sort of red-claylike sand that you can find by the barrel on Great Falls Island. Maybe it is somewhere else around the lake, but if it is, I never knew it. Gee, you're entirely too dumb to take any chances like that, Mr. Davis!"

Larry stared at the girl. He shuddered as though a cold wind had suddenly blown over him. Little Beth knew how close to ruin he had stood—she who could know nothing of the padded pay roll and his now frantic desire to rid himself of the ghost girls he had created to earn money for him! But this girl believed in him. And what a worm he was! Would the golden Anne stand by him like this?

"Yes," he said slowly, "I did go to the island. And I can't tell you anything else. All I can repeat is, that I had nothing to do with the crime and that I did not know that girl, had never seen her before."

"Oh, sure," nodded Beth, "I believe you. I told you you could trust me. But I'm only a woman and I've had regrets that I didn't, after all, read that note!"

That was her way of telling him again. She knew he would never insult her by asking, and yet that he must be agonized to know, to be certain, that the contents of the note that had taken him out that night, driven him to the use of her canoe, had not been read by

her. By Jove, the girl was a little brick!

Larry's eyes, somehow misty of a sudden, dwelt upon the charm of Beth Carlin's gypsylike face, the healthy brown tints of summer glowing, vivid, unquenchable, under the creamy white of her satin skin. Refreshing, that's what she was, and strong, and cheering.

Overcome with gratitude and appreciation, all that Larry could manage was: "Thank you, Miss Carlin. I want to feel that you believe in me. I've done a fool thing, that's all. Nothing worse."

But as he went down the street to the cafeteria he patronized when he did not eat at some of the exclusive homes Anne Sheldon had gotten him into, Larry felt dazed and miserable. Beth Carlin held him in the palm of her hand. Heaven be blessed that she was not a husband-hunting female! Common sense. That's what she had. A girl not easy to win, impatient with sentiment or anything like that. No liberties allowed. That type. What had he told her? That he had just done a fool thing, no worse. And with those four imaginary girls yet on the pay roll! A criminal thing, that's what he had done. Theft. The girl's money at that moment in his pocket, the ashes in his ash tray in his room, where he had burned their pay envelopes. He was a criminal and his place was behind bars.

Beth had found that reddish sand on the prow of her canoe. Gosh. Think of that! Smart. And a paddle left upside down as he had left it once before. That told her the story. And what would it have told Malden and that wizard Waterbury who deduced from a few grooves in a dead girl's fingers that she had been a violin player? Gee whiz!

Larry did not know what he ate. He stared before him, his mind far off, his thoughts occupied now and then with the huge clock that ticked on the wall near by. It was ticking off the hours

of Agnes Bell. At midnight—what? And he would have to go to the island. He could run no chance of having Malden find the name "Agnes Bell" on the body of the girl he felt sure would mysteriously die that night. Yet if he went to the Sheldons, how could he get away without causing comment? "How could he get to the island early enough to witness the arrival of this phantom girl and the thing that would kill her?" Larry decided that it would be better not to go to Sheldons at all. He could telephone, making some excuse. And then the idea of leaving the lovely Anne to either Mathews or Horton Fane or some other man that night, just as he was making such headway with her, filled him with distress.

In this state of mind, Larry returned to his room at the Carlins and mechanically began to dress. He could not stay away from Anne.

He had almost finished his toilet when his eyes fell upon something that, for a moment, paralyzed all movement and struck the color from his face.

The ash tray, in which he had burned the pay envelopes of Molly, Bertha, Agnes and Mary, and in which he had left a heap of ashes, was empty—brushed clean—not a trace of ash remaining upon it!

Somebody had been in his room. And there were, he had heard; experts who could read anything—all sorts of secrets, from a few bits of ashes!

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CUFF LINK.

THE sky was splattered with pale stars, and the moon seemed all tangled up in the branches of the tall trees in the Carlin garden, when Larry Davis went down again to seek Beth. It was no night for crime. Rather for young love and romance and all things pertaining to youth that never come again.

And on the Carlin step sat Sam Bogardus and his great dog.

With a brief nod to him, Larry turned to the slight white figure that swung in the worn old hammock in the corner.

"Some one has been in my room," he said, trying to speak calmly.

Beth gave a little soft exclamation.

"Why—something stolen?" she asked.

"Yes," said Larry grimly. "Can you tell me who has been here since I went out to supper?"

"Oh, my goodness, I don't know!" said Beth wretchedly. "Mother has been away all day, and I've been out in the garden a while. You know we never lock doors. But then, nothing valuable was ever left in the rooms before. You shouldn't——"

Larry got himself together with a jerk. Was he admitting that some ashes in his ash tray were valuable? Great heavens!

"Oh, it was just a trifle," he managed to smile. "Maybe I mislaid it. But I felt sure some one had been in my room. Nobody called here or—or anything?"

"Nobody I know of," Beth shook her head. "Sam has been here, and the dog! Mr. Roth and Mr. Johnson are both out. You know they never come in until late. But what have you lost?"

"Oh, never mind," muttered Larry, turning on his heel. "I may find it. It isn't worth mentioning."

Not worth mentioning! The ash from the pay envelopes of those four girls! Ash that, in the correct hands, might send him to jail! Something he had once read in a newspaper flashed through his mind: "Few incendiaries know how exactly ash can be identified. An expert can analyze any ashes chemically and decide beyond a doubt whether they are paper, cotton, wood; and if so, what kind of paper, cotton and wood." There had been a lot more to the article, and it was Larry's love of such a type

of reading matter that had given him the idea of the padded pay roll.

And now some one had gone to his room for the sole purpose of removing the ashes left after the burning of those pay envelopes! He could not doubt that. But would the criminal—his enemy, the horror that waited out on Great Falls Island, that wrote him those notes—have to steal the ash from his ash tray to make sure he was robbing the Sheldon & Van Canter pay roll? No. That enemy knew already. Else why these phantom girls who were being killed off one by one?

A cold perspiration broke out all over Larry. He had another enemy—one, perhaps, on the side of the law! It would take a man with keen analytical brains to desire the possession of that little heap of ashes.

"It isn't anything I could write up, is it?" asked Sam Bogardus dolefully. "Gosh, I never have any luck. Here I was last Saturday night, out with Beth and then going home placidly to bed, hitting the hay, when if I had had the hunch to paddle to Great Falls Island I could have witnessed a big crime and handed in the scoop of a century! If we've had a robbery here, just give me a tip, Davis!"

Larry shrugged. He had no real dislike for Bogardus, save that since the thing he himself was doing would be a prize for the young reporter; he was not comfortable when the other man was around.

"Sorry, but a cuff link would hardly make thrilling reading matter," he smiled.

"Well, now, some cuff links might!" grinned Sam. "Mathews', for instance. Depends on where you find it."

Larry could have sworn then. Why the devil had he said a cuff link? That was what Evans Mathews had lost on Great Falls Island, of course. And would he come downstairs in such a tense agony about the misplacing of one

cuff link? He met Beth's eyes and saw that that young woman distinctly did not believe him.

"By the way, got any ideas about this crime?" ran on Bogardus in his best interviewing voice.

"None at all," said Larry shortly, and strode down the path between the iron dogs.

If that ass Bogardus knew what he did, Beth's loveliest smile would not keep him from the island that night. But why the devil had he said he had missed a cuff link? Probably because Mathews' affair was uppermost in his mind.

As Larry hastened to the Sheldon home, he realized that if he caught Evans Mathews in the act of murdering the mythical Agnes Bell, and Mathews told him that he knew all about the padded pay roll, he would be afraid to move in the case. And he hated himself accordingly, for until his infatuation for Anne Sheldon, Larry Davis had been the most honorable of young men.

"What a cad I've become!" he groaned.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BLOW FALLS.

FATHER wants to see you, Larry," said Anne Sheldon when she came to greet him that evening, a golden girl in a golden gown, her wide eyes smiling direct encouragement into those of the handsome young man who sat upon her porch rail. "I think he is going to give you a raise. I—I had something to do with it, although both he and Mr. Fane have been watching you for a long time."

Larry's heart missed a beat, and the two white hands on his arm had nothing to do with it, either.

"I—why, that's splendid, Anne," he managed after a moment. "But I don't deserve——"

"Gracious, that's no way to get on!"

her delicious lips pouted adorably "Take all you can get. That's life. The company isn't paying you anything now. I know you couldn't play around with my set if you hadn't some money of your own, and that would be simply awful. I'd miss you terribly."

"Would you, Anne?" he leaned toward her, bent a little nearer and knew that she would not turn her face away if he snatched a caress. But something stopped him. The thought of the dreadful island, of Beth Carlin, of those stolen ashes!

Mr. Sheldon held out his hand when Larry entered his study. He was a tall, spare man with a kindly face.

"Well, my boy, Fane and I've been talking about you for some time," he smiled. "And we think you deserve a real job. Report to my office on Monday morning and I'll place you with an advanced salary. I have a new man coming into your old job on Monday."

The handsome room whirled with Larry, but he managed to look calm enough. The blow had fallen sooner than he had expected. A new man, next Saturday, would find pay envelopes on his window ledge for four girls who would never ask for them. Then what? The report to the treasurer, the inquiry, ruin and imprisonment.

Yet there was nothing to do. He could not insist upon keeping a poor job when a good one with more money was offered. It seemed as though some unseen force was hounding him.

"Thank you, sir," he said at last. "That's great. But I should like a few days to get my papers, the records—er—the office in order."

"You're known for your methodical way of keeping things," smiled Sheldon. "I'm not afraid the new man will have any trouble. He is a nice young chap, I understand, but he won't get on like you do, Larry. He hasn't your determination or your ambition. The last few weeks you seem to have fallen off

in those two qualities a bit, but you've been playing kind of hard with Anne's set. That takes it out of a chap, out of him and his bank roll. My daughter is extravagant."

Larry knew, with a sinking heart, that Sheldon had seen how things were going between Anne and himself, and that he sought to make it easier for him, Larry, by raising him to a position from which he could the better woo his daughter. A kindly man, Anne's father! And he, Larry, had been stealing from him!

"I hope I'll make good, Mr. Sheldon," he said with a long breath. "I'm going to try, sir, the best I know how!"

As he spoke Larry looked frankly into the older eyes watching him. He meant what he said. He would get rid of those four ghost girls if he had to lock up this new timekeeper. A little time, a little chance, and none of those girls could be traced, neither could any one say they had never been, for even the word of a foreman or forewoman may be doubted when so many employees are constantly being changed. Labor in East Ithington was an uncertain thing.

"I know you will, my boy," replied Sheldon heartily and put out his hand again. "I have two positions in mind for you. Drop into my office early Monday and we'll talk them over."

Larry might have asked Anne Sheldon to marry him that night. He realized that. And yet he did not dare. Not until he knew that the pay roll was again as it should be. Four ghostly young faces came between even when he danced with Anne and looked deep into her lovely blue eyes.

Mathews treated him with the same gay good humor, and Larry decided not to open the subject of the false alibi and his own denial to Malden that afternoon. If Mathews had killed the mystery girl the preceding week, he would soon know it, for the clock kept remind-

ing him that he must soon start for Great Falls Island if he intended to trap the criminal.

He could plead a headache. That was the thing to do. Anne would sympathize if he said he was sick. And he really was getting a headache when he faced the things that were before him. That night and Monday. What was he to do? Before Monday dawned he must find a way out somehow. He must gain, at least, another week, in his old office. He would take the chance of getting rid of the four girls in one week. Risky, but not so unusual. There were flesh and blood girls always leaving, now that September was on the way.

"Oh, dear," pouted Anne, "we're just going to have some supper! Must you go?"

"What, leaving us, old man?" Mathews came across the porch with a pretty girl on his arm.

"Yes," said Larry briefly. "A beastly headache."

He looked, as he spoke, straight into Evans Mathews' eyes. Was it possible that this pleasant young man had an appointment in a short time on Great Falls Island with a girl whom he meant to kill? Could such things be? It seemed wildly impossible and outrageous. And yet——

They would all remember, afterward, that he had said he had a headache, and had gone home early. But what would there be to associate him with the coming tragedy? All that he dreaded was that padded pay roll. To get rid of those girls!

Larry had a genuine headache after he got away from Anne and the gay young people on the Sheldon porch and hurried through the fragrant moonlight.

If he had only waited; if he had not been such a fool, he might have had a decent job and the girl he wanted—his golden girl! And how happy he would

have been to-night! While here he was, dreading exposure, fearing an unknown enemy, hastening to a tryst with a mysterious death!

CHAPTER XV.

THE SECOND TRYST.

IT was out of the question to use Beth Carlin's canoe again. The girl was a brick, a pal worth having, and he could not involve her further in the dreadful doings on the island. So that was that. But he must have a boat and quickly, too. It was getting late and he might not be in time to see what he felt he must see that night, or go mad. If he might talk with that girl before her murderer got there! Then he could learn the truth and possibly save her life.

Knowing the garrulous boatmen along the shore of the lake, Larry kept away from them and found at last the boat he had in mind, a canoe that lay in a row of others near a boys' camp. He could take that and no one would be the wiser. Fool that he had been to use Beth Carlin's canoe! That had placed him absolutely in the girl's power, and what, after all, did he know of her?

There was a golden moon as Larry shoved out from shore, dipping his paddle noiselessly, keeping in the shadows. His heart pounded and his nerves ached. And yet he felt that he must not permit this night's experience to get him, for there was Monday to face. The trifling amount of money that his phantom girls had been able to earn for him was certainly not worth all the trouble and mental agony it had involved him in.

Great Falls Island slipped closer and closer across the gleaming water, and Larry laid his hand on his gun and his flash light. Mathews would have had plenty of time to reach the island, for he had wasted a lot of it himself getting

the canoe. It would be easy to find out when the other man had left the Sheldon party. He could not use him, Larry, a second time for an alibi!

At any rate, there was no sign of life about the island, and it was now almost midnight. Later than Larry had wished to arrive, but he had not been able to tear himself from Anne Sheldon, or to make a reasonable enough sounding excuse.

More cautious than he had been the other time, he now circled the island, keeping in the shadows and moving as noiselessly as an Indian. There was a creeping horror about the place that got him, nervy as he usually was. And that murmur of the falls, the wash and smack of the water along the beach sent eerie chills along his spine.

He must be in time, for there was no other boat on the island. He made sure of that before he pulled his own into a little cove and made it secure, its nose deep in that red-claylike sand that Beth had spoken of. Then, walking soundlessly, he approached the front of the cottage, where he would have a good view of the two most likely landing places.

It was a superb night and nothing stirred anywhere near the tense young man on Great Falls Island. Far away there was the *put-put-put* of a motor boat, growing fainter. No matter what he found, even if he were alone, it was far from comfortable being in the place where that poor girl had died last week! Hester Brown, and now Agnes Bell! A shudder ran along his spine, and he paused, staring in chilled horror at a dark blotch on the porch of the cottage. What was that—just where the other girl had lain? Did he have nerve enough to go up and find out?

Larry had undergone enough to try any normal young man's steady nerves. His ghost girls, coming mysteriously to life, only to die again, had tortured him for a week. He could not be blamed

for staring a long time at that spot on the broad porch where, unmistakably, something lay!

With a jerk he pulled himself together, and whipping out his gun and his flash light, he walked cautiously up the path to the porch steps, across the porch to the front door, and in another moment was bending over the body of the second girl he had found dead upon that same spot!

CHAPTER XVI.

IN COMPETENT HANDS.

AS he knelt over the body and saw that the girl was young, pretty, and that she had, like the mysterious Hester Brown, been killed with a blow on the head, all his panic seemed to desert Larry and he became steady and cool, although conscious of a consuming rage.

Who was this fiend who in some way enticed strange girls to that deserted island and killed them so ruthlessly? Who sought to involve him by using the names of the girls he must have seen on that slip of paper to bring him to the scene of the tragedy? A new feeling surged over Larry. Instead of now being obsessed with only the desire to get away quickly himself, he was eager to follow this thing to a finish. He was able now to understand the feverish interest of Malden and Waterbury.

At any moment he might be knocked over the head himself, by the horror that either came to the island, or remained there. But he bent above the girl with his flash light turned glaringly upon her face. He had never seen her before, and he put all ridiculous ideas of Agnes Bell from him. There was no Agnes Bell, he kept repeating. He had to, or he would have sunk into a nervous collapse. Yet he was sure that he would find that name somewhere about the body.

The door of the cottage was once

again open behind the body of the girl, but since the authorities had never mended the broken lock, this was not so strange, although Larry decided to go over the interior thoroughly before he left the island, even though it might be a trap set for him. This was not only an affair that concerned these poor girls. It was decidedly his affair!

First he must make sure there was no mark of identification on the body.

The girl wore a long, light coat, the pockets of which were empty. In the hand bag she still clutched he found nothing save a few loose bills, a handkerchief and a soiled vanity case. Not until he opened, with a shudder, the flat silver locket she wore by a black ribbon around her neck, did he find the familiar little slip of paper bearing the name: "Agnes Bell, East Ithington."

Crushing the thing, with hardly a second glance, into his pocket, Larry rose and glared about him. He felt at that moment that he could have killed this beast, or man or thing—whatever it was—with his bare hands. What sort of a horrible farce was being played? And there were three more girls on that pay roll! Before another Saturday came this thing must be stopped. He could take those names from the pay roll, of course, if he had time, but what else could he do? Would the girls ever really die until they were murdered upon this island of crime and mystery?

At any rate, there was nothing else about the girl that said she was Agnes Bell. Larry made shudderingly sure of that, careful to leave no finger prints on the silver locket. The slip of paper, he felt sure, had been placed in that locket after the girl had died, and placed there so that Larry would not find it!

Suddenly he started and stepped back into the shadows. A canoe was cautiously approaching the island. It must have been coming for some time, but Larry had been so absorbed that he had not heard it. Infinite caution was being

observed by the newcomer. The canoe, keeping in the shadows, began to circle the island as Larry had. Larry, perforce, greatly alarmed, left the porch and crept about among the shrubbery and the darkness after the sound of that paddle. Where would the man land? Would his own canoe be discovered? Was it Malden or Waterbury, or the criminal returning?

Below the falls the canoe was drawn in. Larry heard the step of the new arrival as he moved carefully toward the cottage. He himself, drawing back in the darkness beside the house, held his gun and his flash light in readiness. His brain worked rapidly. If this proved to be Mathews or any man he did not know, it was up to him to grab him. But if he did how could he explain his own presence on that cursed island?

But Larry's misery was short lived. The approaching figure inadvertently stepped through a patch of moonlight, and Larry lowered his pistol with a gasp of amazement, tinged with disgust.

The man was Sam Bogardus, the red-headed reporter on the *News*!

It would be impossible, Larry knew, for him to get away from the island without Bogardus knowing it. No use to consider such a thing. It was risky and looked guilty for him to hang about until the fellow discovered his presence. Larry knew that once Sam found the body, he would miss nothing on that island. The best thing to do was to go to him immediately and confess that he, too, had come from curiosity. Being there himself, Sam could hardly say anything to the other for admitting the same motives.

As Bogardus approached the steps of the porch Larry came out of the shadows.

"Gosh, I'm glad it's you, Bogardus!" he said. "I was scared for a moment. There has been another crime here."

Sam Bogardus paused with a start of

amazement. He stared for a moment at Larry.

"Say, what you doing here, Davis?" he demanded.

"I might ask the same of you," said Larry with a faint grin. "The bright remark you made this evening about wishing you had known in time last Saturday night about the crime committed here, got me thinking maybe there would be something doing out here to-night after the police had withdrawn. I slipped away early from the Sheldon party and here I am."

"Oh!" said Bogardus slowly. "I see. Well, that's what brought me. And I haven't had a chance really to go over this place since Waterbury has had charge. Our paper and the cops have had it back and forth kinda heavy the last two years. They're sore on us. Make it hard for us. But what did you say about another crime? Not——"

"Yes," nodded Larry. "Another girl, Sam. Killed the same way. I found her in the same place. I had just gotten here myself and so we were both too late."

But Sam Bogardus was already kneeling by the body of the girl. Larry had never liked him, as has been said, for no reason whatever, but now he watched that brisk young man go about an expert preliminary police investigation. He missed nothing about the body or its immediate vicinity, and his flash light darted everywhere. At last he stooped and removed from the floor beside the girl a pair of tortoise-shell rimmed glasses, evidently fallen from her nose. These he examined beneath his powerful light for a moment, gave a satisfied grunt, and wrapping them in his handkerchief, with great care, Larry thought, placed them in his pocket. Then he knelt beside the small feet and drew off, carefully, the slippers the girl wore.

"What are you doing that for?" whispered Larry in horror.

"Well," said Sam as he ran his hands deep into the slippers after shoving the flash light at his companion to hold, "I haven't seen anything yet, not even so much as a tailor or dressmaker's label or a store mark, to identify this body. I reckon the cops are going to be up against it again. But I'm going to feel sure before Malden gets here, that I haven't missed a trick. You never can tell where a clew may——"

To Larry's amazement he drew from one slipper a folded and soiled slip of paper. It had evidently been placed there because the slipper was a bit too large or moved up and down and hurt the heel.

"Like enough put in there when the shoe was bought," nodded Bogardus. "Betcha it was, for she would know right off it wasn't comfortable. And the shoe isn't old, though it has nothing about it to tell us where she got it or whose make it is. However, I've got this, praise be."

And the soiled, folded slip of newspaper was placed in his pocket with the eyeglasses.

"And no sign of a weapon anywhere," he mused. "Guess she was walloped with one of those big stones out there. Looks like it."

"I don't see," began Larry dazedly, wishing that this energetic young man had not happened along to investigate the case of Agnes Bell.

"My dear chap," said Bogardus as he got to his feet, "these cases on Crime Island, as I shall hereafter term this sylvan spot, are from this hour on in competent hands! Come along. Let's go through the blooming cottage!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE PERSISTENT INVADER.

INSIDE the cottage Larry walked behind the swiftly moving reporter, feeling as though he would give a lot to cut and run. The way Bogardus was

going about the mystery was anything but comfortable. He acted like a professional detective. Who would have thought the fellow had it in him?

But the cottage gave up no clew, carefully as Mr. Bogardus looked. When they returned to the living room Larry spoke impulsively.

"See here, Bogardus, I have to know what you are going to do with those eyeglasses and that wad of paper you took from her slipper." He kept his hand on the other's arm, for the reporter was not still a moment.

"Oh!" Sam looked at Larry vaguely, still flashing his light about. "You see, nobody has been in here but the darn fool cops, I guess. I don't find any traces of the girl or our criminal. Of course, there may have been—but why the deuce that door is always open? I don't get it."

"But the glasses and that paper," persisted Larry.

"Oh, yes! Well, I don't mind telling you what I'm going to do. Hold the light. We better not go out on the porch with it again or we'll have somebody stopping in before we notify the police. Hold it close. See these glasses?"

From the handkerchief Bogardus carefully removed the shell-rimmed glasses. Larry stared, shuddering. To the news-hunting reporter this was just a chance at a case, a big scoop, but what it was to him! If Sam Bogardus had any idea of that!

"Yeh, I see them," he replied.

"Well, look carefully. Hold the light nearer, like that. See this left lens?"

Larry stared closely down at the glass Bogardus held under the light. It was smeared with a crimson stain in spots.

"Ugh—yes," he shuddered. "I see it."

"Well," the reporter spoke proudly, "this thing on it is a print. See?"

"A print?"

"Sure, a print. A peach of a print,

too. But it isn't from a finger, like you think."

"No," said Larry wonderingly, "it looks too big. But how——"

"It is too big," chuckled Bogardus and carefully folded the glasses away again, replacing them in his pocket. "It is the print of a nose, my friend, a dog's nose. Get that? Isn't it beautiful?"

"A—a *what?*" Larry drew away from the other.

"Yep, a dog's nose. He got it damp out there on the floor and then stuck it accommodately on this lens, right smack. We might find some more prints if we looked, but I bet not. The man, his master—the criminal of course—probably called him off then. But I got his print all right and I'm going to enlarge it and nose print every dog within a hundred miles if necessary, until I find the one that was here to-night!"

"Oh, good heavens!" gasped Larry, feeling weak and sick.

"What's the matter?" asked Sam disgustedly. "Getting nerves? Gosh, you'd never make a reporter! But I'll solve this case now before Waterbury does! You can't tie the Bogardus! Now this paper I took from her slipper. I got that all mapped out. Some shoe dealer can tell me what make her slipper is and what stores handle it, see? Sure he can. Then I'm going through the files of newspapers in our office—and believe me, boy, we gotta bunch—until I find the one that uses this type—this make-up.

"I know about all the type forms of the papers in the big cities. This is not one of them. I got my work cut out. But when I find out where this paper was printed and what make of shoe this is and what stores carry them—boy, oh, boy, I'll come near to tracing this girl! Of course, this may not be necessary, for somebody may know her, but I got my doubts. Betcha this is last week's crime all over again."

Larry was glowing with awed admiration. He looked at Sam Bogardus as he had never looked at him before at any time.

"Say, that's great work!" he said, and the slip of paper in his pocket, nestling beside the one that had been left on his window ledge that day seemed to be burning a hole in his coat—the slip of paper bearing the four word, "Agnes Bell. East Ithington."

"Well, it will be if I can pull it," said Sam modestly. "I've been aching for a chance at something like this. Now, we better notify the cops. And watch Malden suspect both of us! He will, right off the bat. But we can stand by each other—side by side, and tell the same story for gosh sake, see?"

But Larry did not feel like answering Bogardus' chuckle. He was far from chuckling. All that he wanted to do was get away from that horrible island. That about the print of a dog's nose simply nauseated him. Mathews had a dog. But as far as that went, so had Bogardus himself.

"Do I have to stick around here?" he asked. "I'd like to go home. Of course, I'll be there if they want me. But I feel all in. I was alone, you see, when I discovered her."

"Sure, and you were the first one to do so," nodded Sam. "Malden will land on you with both feet. But you should worry. Just tell the truth. And you can run along if you want to. I'm just going over to that cottage on shore there and telephone and then I'll come back here and stay until Malden gets here. You beat it. You look about sick."

"If you think I had better stick around"—hesitated Larry, knowing well that he should stay on this devilish island while Sam went to telephone—"I will."

"No, run along," grinned Bogardus. "I'm not averse to being found in sole charge. I'm gonna solve this thing, see

if I don't! You can't tie the Bogardus. I roll my own."

"Well, I'll be in my room when they want me," nodded Larry, and started for his canoe. "Good luck. You begin like Sherlock Holmes."

"Boy friend," said Mr. Bogardus solemnly, paradoxically, "a pickle like this is apple sauce to me!"

As Larry paddled swiftly away from the cursed spot, he realized with an inward groan that, were it not for those phantom girls on his pay roll—those girls who were dying one by one there on that island—he would have enjoyed going in with Sam Bogardus on the investigation, watching that enthusiastic young man work. He sounded as though his stuff would be good. Between Waterbury and Sam, Larry felt that his own crime would soon be laid bare, for if they caught the criminal it very likely would, anyhow. But what could the criminal know of the padded pay roll? That brought him back to the beginning again and his head began to spin.

He succeeded in slipping the canoe in among its fellows near the silent camp, and then he walked swiftly back to the Carlin house, starting at every shadow.

He was in for it now. The little things that had upset him earlier in the day, like Malden's questions and the fact that Waterbury was on the verge of identifying the mystery girl of last week, and the disappearance of those ashes from his tray in his room, faded into insignificance. There was to be a new man in his office on Monday and there had been another murder to-night—one which he could not keep out of, which that clever, eager Sam Bogardus was determined to solve!

The Carlin house was dark when he entered it, save for the tiny gas jet Mrs. Carlin left burning in the lower hall every night. There was electric light through the rest of the house, but the

gas had been left there for economy's sake.

Larry went softly to his room and opened his door, which he never locked. To lock anything in the Carlin house was considered an insult. Crossing to the light that hung over his bureau he put up his hand and turned it on, and then paused, while every muscle in his body seemed to grow tense. In reaching for the button to turn on the light his fingers had first brushed the globe, and the globe was *hot*!

The light had just been turned out in his room, probably as he came up the stairs! Some one had been in there. The persistent person who had taken the ashes, in all probability!

Stepping silently and swiftly to the door Larry looked up and down the hall, but absolute darkness and silence rewarded him. As he returned to his room, however, a shudder shook him. Was his enemy in the very house with him? Could he trust Beth Carlin, or was she playing a double game, probably to give Sam Bogardus, her lover, publicity that would make him famous—give him a tremendous scoop and a more tremendous raise?

Larry sank on the edge of his bed and sat there for a long time staring into space.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE NEW MAN.

LARRY was not disturbed that night, neither was there any further attempt to enter his room, although he did not fall asleep until almost morning. Out on Crime Island the law was taking its course, but it apparently did not need Larry Davis until later.

He was awakened by the usual jangle of the Sunday church bells, and the scent of the waffles Mrs. Carlin always made for Sunday morning breakfast. Life seemed so ordinary. Yet every nerve in his body shuddered when he

remembered last night and drew from the pocket of his coat the slip of paper containing the words, "Agnes Bell. East Ithington." Then, too, before his eyes was that ash tray swept of its ashes, and the dangling electric bulb that had been hot the night before when he entered his room! Other agonies overwhelmed him as he dressed. The new timekeeper was to be in the office on Monday—to-morrow!

A stout young man with a hearty laugh was on the porch with Beth when Larry descended, and Beth turned to Larry with a smile.

"Mr. Davis, this is Mr. Cade, the new timekeeper," she nodded her pretty head. "He gets your job, he tells me. Are you fired or raised?"

Larry thought the laughter in her eyes was forced and that she looked pale. As for him, he was in no mood for laughter, and it certainly gave him no joy to greet the stout young man.

"I'm from the Western factory," nodded Cade as he shook hands. "Guess you are not sorry I've got your job. You're in luck."

Larry regarded him with lack-luster eyes, though he forced himself to reply politely.

"Going to board here?" he asked as he turned away in the direction of his pet cafeteria.

"Yep," Cade nodded with a loud laugh. "Good thing Mr. Sheldon sent me here. Just the kind of place I like. This house, I mean. And I've wanted to come East. That's why I got this little jump."

"Did you hear about the other murder on the island?" Beth asked as Larry continued to move.

"Yes," he said, turning about and meeting her eyes squarely. "I found the body. I'll tell you more about that later. Sam and I were there together."

Beth nodded, but she did not reply and Larry went on down the path. He wondered dully what she thought. But

who had been in his room if it had not been Beth?

Bogardus had been in time for the morning edition of his paper, and "Crime Island," as Larry heard it everywhere called, was the topic on every one's tongue. He bought a paper, but beyond seeing it mentioned that Mr. Bogardus and Mr. Larry Davis, who was employed by the Sheldon & Van Canter Company, had discovered the body, he found nothing else in the paper that connected him with the second crime. But that was a-plenty!

And there was that beastly timekeeper. Worst thing that could have happened to him just then, having that fat chump in the office while Mary and Bertha and Molly were still on the pay roll. He dreaded a dumb-bell like the new man appeared to be far more than a smart chap. If Cade would only get sick or die or even be sent for from home!

Suddenly Larry felt an overpowering desire to talk with Bogardus. He must see somebody! Let them look for him up at Carlins. He would find out first what Bogardus had discovered. It made him uneasy when he recalled the reporter's expert way of going about an investigation. Then, too, Bogardus had had some bright ideas. That print on the glasses and the paper he had taken from the girl's slipper—

Sam Bogardus looked up vaguely when Larry was shown into his presence. He was seated on the floor in a small room of the office building where the *East Ithington News* was published. All about him in heaps lay dust-covered papers, from all parts of the State. His red hair was rumpled and his face was dirty, while his sleeves were rolled up and he looked as though he had not slept.

"Hullo!" he greeted his caller impatiently. "I been having the devil of a time working through all this stuff! I only have this little pile left now. Been

hours at it, but I haven't found the make-up I'm looking for."

"Don't they know who she is?" asked Larry fearfully.

"Nope. Same old thing over again. Chief is tearing his hair. Waterbury is dazed. But Sam got there first! They're crazy to see you. But hurray for me, Davis! You can't tie the Bogardus. Now if you keep your mouth shut, I'll let you in on the right way to handle a big case. I'm onto the only sure way to trace this dame, see if I'm not! Just you watch little Ivan I. Dea for a while."

Feeling anything but cheerful and having the notion that Sam's conceited speech was only too close to the truth, Larry sat down and lighted a cigarette, watching the other moodily. If Sam knew what he knew, or even what Beth Carlin knew! Beth, though she may have been the person who stole those ashes from his tray and was snooping about his room the night before just as he came in, had not as yet confided her suspicions to her reporter admirer. Of that Larry felt certain. He could see that Bogardus was feverishly looking for clues, but that he had no real ones as yet.

A shout from Bogardus so startled Larry that he dropped his cigarette. The red-headed reporter was dancing upon the piles of newspapers like an inspired imp, one of them flaunted in his hand.

"You brought me luck, Davis!" he cried. "Now all I have to do is trace little Ima Vamp among the shoe dealers! Can't be done on Sunday. Look at this. Are your ignorant eyes capable of taking in what it means? I've found it, and not only the paper with the make-up I want, but it's the very paper this one was torn from—the same issue, I mean! Golly, I can tell when she bought her shoes! See, this one of ours has the date! And part of this serial story. Look! 'In wordless ec-

stasy he folded her in his bold arms! Isabelle looked into his face with love-lighted eyes——' See. Only part of it in the wad the girl put in her slipper, but the whole thing is here, in this last month's issue of the Waterville *Star*! Don't know what the paper is doing in here with these war veterans I've been plowing through! Oh, boy, can you see my next step?"

Larry could. He thought, too, that he could see his own. And always, dancing before his wretched mental gaze, was the stout figure and the hearty laugh of the new man, Cade.

"That's very clever, Bogardus," he said weakly.

The girl had only bought those shoes the previous month, and the paper was a sheet from a comparatively small town, not a day's journey away! But then, Larry's common sense came to his rescue. There was no Agnes Bell! The girl could not be named that, even if they traced her. His enemy, the mysterious criminal, had put that name in the silver locket about her neck, as he had placed the name Hester Brown, in the purse of the other girl. He would go mad if the thing went on! He must take those others from the pay roll—but then the burly form of Cade rose once more before his mental eye. Cade would be on the job Monday.

If he only had a few days he might get rid of the three girls! But those days were denied him.

Bogardus rose from the litter of papers he had been endeavoring to fling into piles. His eyes glittered.

"Come on, let's go down and see what they want with you at headquarters," he nodded to Larry. "I'm anxious to find out what Waterbury has discovered. Nothing, I betcha."

As he spoke a heavy step sounded on the stair and Chief Malden's bulk filled the doorway. His narrow little eyes brightened as they fell upon Larry.

"Ah—I figured I'd find Sam here

and that he could tell me where you were, young man," he nodded. "We are anxious to talk to you."

Larry's heart sank, but he presented a calm enough appearance.

"Well, we were just coming around," he said.

The chief glanced at the litter of papers on the floor and at Sam's disheveled head.

"What have you been doing?" he snapped.

"Going back—back into the musty past," snickered the reporter pulling down his shirt sleeves and running a grimy hand over his rumpled hair. "How is Waterbury coming on? Found out who she is yet?"

Malden grunted. He seemed angry and bewildered.

"We haven't found out a thing," he shook his head. "But these here crimes out on that island have got to stop. Why, it's an awful thing—every Saturday night! And unknown women! Gosh, we'll have the entire State down on us! We've got a fiend in our midst!"

"Did you find out what she was killed with?" asked Sam.

"It was a stone. Must have been a big one," said Malden. "Waterbury found particles of it in the wound in her head. He's analyzed the bits already and he says it was an ordinary stone—one like the rest on the island, with grains of that reddish sand on it. And that's smart of the criminal, too. No gun to find or identify, no knife, no possible prints on her throat if she'd been choked."

"Waterbury is good," said Sam with a glint in his eyes.

"He'll get it if anybody will," nodded Malden. "Now, Davis, I want your story. You found the girl first, I believe."

"Yes," Larry got up the nerve to smile. "Sam here was talking and that got me thinking maybe there would be something doing out on the island last

night. He was wishing he had known about that crime last week, for if he had he would have had a fine scoop. I left the Sheldon house a little early, got a canoe and went out there. I discovered the girl almost right off. And in no time after that Sam came along. We both looked all about, but found no one and no weapon—nothing. That's all I can tell you."

"Waterbury will want to question you," said the chief with a searching look at Larry. "I'll leave you to him. I guess you've got more to tell. If you haven't, how come we found this on the island, in a corner of the porch? Sam said you had come out of your room last evening in a fuss because somebody had swiped your cuff button. If this is not yours, whose is it?"

To the gaping astonishment of Larry the chief produced one of his cuff links, engraved with his initials, L. D. It was a link he had not worn all summer.

"Ain't that yours?" snapped Malden.

"Why, yes," stammered Larry. "But I haven't worn it for months! I haven't even missed it. I——"

"Haven't missed it when you came down to the porch last night yelling that somebody had been in your room and swiped it?" roared the chief. "Do you know what I think? I think you know more about this thing than you let on, and that last night Sam bust in on that island and caught you! I think——"

"Now look here," snapped Sam Bogardus crisply. "Just because you're up a tree don't try to blacken a spotless reputation like this bird has, chief! Why, he's always been as pure as a lily, the untouched snow and all the rest of it! I never thought when I told you he had a notion somebody had been in his room last night that you would dig up a cuff button belonging to him! And let me tell you something right here. I saw Davis land on that island myself and I was right smack behind him. It wasn't any time before I run in my own boat.

No guy, no matter how swift a worker he was, could have committed a murder that quick."

Larry looked from the cuff link to Sam in amazement. One bewildered him as much as the other. Why would Bogardus help him? He had first told what he said about missing a cuff link, and now he came out with what was actually an alibi! It had been some time before he had heard the approach of Sam's boat, some time after he had been on the wretched island and had discovered the body. What had induced him to say he had lost a cuff link, when all his alarmed brain was centered upon that ash tray in his room, swept clear of the damning ashes?

Sam did not long leave him in doubt.

"Sorry I mentioned that you said you'd lost a cuff link," he nodded at Larry. "But I happened to when I was telling why I went to the island myself. It was because I said to you—you'll remember, I know, for you just mentioned it—that I wished I had known ahead of time about last week's crime. The thing seemed to get me and I went out there because I couldn't keep away. And anyhow, chief, if Davis lost this link at the time of the crime, he certainly wouldn't miss it and talk about it some hours before the crime was committed!"

"There's something to that," said the chief slowly. "But how would Davis' cuff link get on the island? I know he hasn't been there because we only just took off the guard before this second thing happened."

"Waterbury is smart," said Sam patronizingly, "but he's got no imagination. Now, from the first, this thing looked like a repeater to me. Maybe we'll have still another out on that cursed island, who knows? You can't keep your men there forever."

Larry shuddered. His phantom girls, dying one by one! Creations of his own wild brain! Deeper and deeper

they were involving him in crime. And to-morrow Cade went into his office.

"Didn't you find one of Mathews' cuff links there last week?" asked Sam. "Getting to be rather a dumping place for jewels, eh? A unique way of going about the investigation would be to find out who steals the cuff links of all our promising young men, huh?"

"That's not bad at that," said Malden, still regarding Larry with heavy suspicion. "Sam, if we have to send for outside authority on this case it'll break my heart! But it looks pretty involved to me."

Sam winked at Larry and patted the paper which he had thrust into his pocket.

"Cheer up," he told the police chief, "Ivan I. Dea is on the job."

"Did you get a good look at this girl last night?" the chief asked Larry, turning from Sam as though his ravings annoyed him.

"Yes."

"You never saw her before? Sure she never worked for your company?"

Larry shuddered. "Oh, no, I don't know her," he protested.

"Humph!" said the chief. "Well, you come now and have another look."

Larry knew that the chief held him in suspicion. What would have happened if Malden knew that he had been on the island the preceding Saturday night, that he had again been the first to discover the body?

On the way down the steps to the street Sam Bogardus managed to draw close to Larry, and while the chief's heavy feet were resounding, he whispered: "You know those glasses? Well, I've developed swell prints of that dog's nose! I'm going after that dog and I'll even get prints of my own animal, Davis! I'm nothing if not thorough."

Larry managed to grin a bit at this. Thank heavens, he had no dog! That let him out there.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE TRAIL OF PERFUME.

HORTON FANE and Evans Mathews were leaving the undertaking parlors when the chief and the two young men arrived. Fane gave Larry a pleasant nod, but Mathews put out his hand.

"Shake, old man," he said with light sarcasm. "I hear they found one of your cuff links on the island, too. Glad to have company. But I'm sorry you left the party early last night. We can't give you an alibi!"

Larry regarded the other coldly.

"Malden knows all about my movements," he said with a shrug. "And I've no intention of involving my friends in a lie."

Waterbury looked after the society men as they entered the car at the curb. He turned to the chief.

"Those guys say they never saw the girl," he said and passed a weary hand over his slightly bald head. "Where do all these females come from?"

"They're lured here," said the chief gloomily, "lured here and killed! Who does the lurin' is our job. Did you look into this Mathews' alibi? He lied last week."

"Sure, and it's as clear as a crossword puzzle," sneered Waterbury. "He was at the Sheldon house and then he wasn't, and some folks saw him and then they didn't. He had plenty of time to slip off to the island and back, provided he was cold-blooded enough. It's a sure thing anyhow, that he said goodbye to Miss Sheldon and her pals at quarter to one. The rest of the time he was first cousin to an eel."

Larry found that he could look down on the dead girl with an absence of the panic he had felt the preceding week when he had viewed the body of the so-called Hester Brown. These girls were flesh and blood and why should he fear them? It was their murderer he had

to dread, and if Sam found him, then what? Without any doubt it would be exposure for him, Larry, for in some mysterious fashion, the fiendish criminal had discovered the secret of the padded pay roll, and for some equally mysterious reason was using its names.

Waterbury had been rounding up the boatmen along the lake and bringing them in for a look at the girl; for one of the most important points was the manner in which she had reached the island. One of these men remained while Larry looked at the girl. He was a gray-haired, tobacco-chewing, deliberate sort of individual, and while Larry stood beside the body he bent low above it, sniffed, touched the plain little dress the girl wore, sniffed again, and nodded at the detective.

"This here perfume she's got on," he said. "The cushions of my launch smells powerful of it. I ain't never smelled just that perfume before."

"What about your launch?" snapped Waterbury, drawing close. "Did you take this girl in it to the island?"

"I did not," said the boatman. "But maybe my boy did. He runs the boats when I don't. And this morning when I was dusting them out and kinda going over 'em like we do on Sunday, this here strong perfume comes up in my face off the cushions. I never give it a thought again until I smelled it here, on her clothes."

"Where is your boy?" asked Waterbury eagerly. "Can you get him here at once?"

"Yep," nodded the old man. "He'll be out at the landing. I'll go get him."

"Hurry up," cried Waterbury with suppressed excitement. "Now, Davis, until this man returns, I want to ask you some questions."

When the old boatman came back, accompanied by a lad of seventeen or so, the detective had gotten no more out of Larry than the chief had, though he had plied him with clever cross-examining

and had done his best to trip him. Larry had nothing to tell. Hedged about as he was by his own dangers, he guarded carefully his tongue, and Waterbury was exasperated and Sam exultant when the man and the boy finally appeared.

"I hope to gosh you didn't do it," whispered Sam with a grin, "for this looks like a romantic, intricate case to me, and with you being guilty it wouldn't have a single kick!"

"Sure," said the boy taking one look at the dead girl, "I saw that dame last night. I took her to the island myself."

The authorities drew an audible breath. At last they had their feet on solid ground!

"Go on," said Waterbury and relaxed in his chair.

"Ain't nothin' to tell," said the boy, edging away from the body. "She just walked out on the dock as I was putting the boats away—it must have been half past ten—and asked if I would take her out to Great Falls Island. I took her and she never said a word the whole way. When she got out and paid me I said there wasn't nobody on the island and did she know that and hadn't she made a mistake, but she said, 'Oh, no,' and giggled kinda silly, and run up the path toward the cottage.

"I yelled after her hadn't I better come back for her, but she never answered, and so I give it up and come home and put up the boats. That's all. I thought she was a nut, wanting to go to that island where there'd been a murder the week before. I was glad to get away from it."

"What did you think the girl wanted there?" asked Waterbury.

"How would I know?" retorted the boy. "I thought maybe she was one of these here fool reporters. They're always doing all kinds of crazy stunts."

His leering look at Sam Bogardus was returned with interest.

"And where had the girl come from

when she asked you to take her to the island?"

"How'd I know? She just walked up behind me and asked. I don't know where she come from. Maybe on a train or a trolley. I didn't hear a car, but I wasn't listenin', and they're passin' all the time."

"We have not been able to figure out how the other girl got there," muttered the chief.

"And we're not much further now," growled Waterbury.

CHAPTER XX.

AN ARREST.

LARRY forced himself to dine at the Sheldons that day, but how he got through with it he never afterward knew. The entire topic of conversation was the second crime on Great Falls Island. The exclusive circle in which the Sheldons moved had ignored as far as possible the first crime, but the next, coming upon the following Saturday night and being an exact duplicate of the other, could not be sidetracked by any one. The whole town was stirred up.

Horton Fane strolled across his lawn late in the evening to chat for a few minutes with Larry about the boatman who owned the launch the mystery girl had used, and Larry saw to his annoyance that the older man had a proprietary air toward Anne. He himself could step in and snatch Anne from any of them at that moment, he knew, but he was not free to do so. How could he ask the golden girl to marry him, when the morrow faced him so hideously, the loud-voiced Cade ready to take charge in his office, the three phantom girls still on the pay roll? And at any moment the astute Waterbury, or that clever chap Bogardus, might stumble upon something that would connect him with the two crimes even more than his missing cuff link being found

on the scene of the murder. And so Larry answered the mute question in the golden girl's lovely eyes with a miserable silence.

"It is hideous," said Sheldon as Larry was leaving, laying his hand on the young man's shoulder, "for them to connect any of us even in a slight way, with these terrible things. Poor Evans, who tried to get you to help him out with a false alibi—an unwise step, I will admit—and who owns the island, whose cuff link was found there, and you, who permitted a morbid and boyish curiosity to take you there last night!

"As for that link of yours, Larry, two being lost on that island begins to look rather silly to me. Our company, too, employing so many girls, necessitates Mr. Fane being called to look at these bodies, and makes it imperative for you also to do so. It is annoying and degrading, and—er—alarming. Malden must take steps to prevent this crime wave spreading.

"I hope you're ready for your new job to-morrow, Larry. Just report to Fane, will you? I'll talk it over with him. I may be out of town myself."

"Yes, sir," replied the miserable Larry, "and thank you. And I'd like to assure you that I——"

"Tut, tut!" Sheldon shrugged impatiently. "I want no assurances."

And Larry stumbled wretchedly homeward, the weight of Sheldon's faith crushing him. Those girls on the pay roll—if only he could get a chance out of sight of Cade to rid himself of them! But he knew well that Cade was going to be the stupid, snooping, inquisitive kind, always at his elbow, nosey, asking questions.

Quick steps behind him startled him so that he swung about, his nerves jumping, and faced nothing worse than Sam Bogardus and his wide grin.

"Say, I've been waiting for you, Davis," he greeted. "I've pulled a whopper! You know those nose prints

—the dog's nose prints I found on the glasses that girl wore?"

"Yes." Larry waited breathlessly.

"Well, guess whose dog left 'em there?"

"Don't torture me!" exploded Larry. "This thing has got me pretty well stirred up. If you've got anything to tell, tell it!"

"It was Evans Mathews' dog, and they've arrested Mathews and accused him of both crimes!" said Sam happily. "Now it only remains for me to trace this girl and find out where Mathews entered her life!"

"Evans Mathews!" Larry felt dazed. "You're crazy."

"Crazy nothing! Don't he own the island and isn't he sweet on Anne Sheldon? Didn't he try to get you to swear to a false alibi for him last week, and has he got a real one for last night? If he didn't slip off from that Sheldon party for a while, why wasn't he around so that folks could vouch for him every minute? And his cuff link——"

"Say, you forget that mine was found there, too," said Larry disgustedly. "Those links are a joke."

"There isn't much of a joke about any of it," said Sam. "And anyhow, there is no doubt about Mathews' dog being on the island. I'll be honest and admit that I'm not up on dog's nose prints and that the cops would hardly have arrested Mathews because his dog's nose just matched that print.

"The study of that stuff where dogs are concerned has as yet in this neck of the woods, been neglected. But after you left the island I snooped about and I found several marks in the sand and on the path where that big dog had planted his feet, and, boy friend, it was the foot of Mathews' dog all right, for he had one of 'em hurt a while back and the hurt kinda spread his toes out queer and deformed. There is no getting away from that. Yes, I take the credit of this dog business myself.

Mathews just laughs and says he isn't responsible for the crimes of his dog, that he is a gay dog! Oh, they can't get a thing out of him."

"He never did it," mused Larry. "The dog could have gone to the island with somebody else, like my cuff link and his went there. All that is old stuff, done to incriminate another person."

"There is more, since you left us for yon palatial mansion," went on Sam. "They know the first girl's name. She left her prints sure enough on the card she signed at an entertainment bureau and a man there identified her picture."

Larry drew a sharp breath. Out of the moonlight about him the face of the phantom Hester Brown seemed to materialize and he could scarcely force his feet along.

"Who is she?" he managed through dry lips.

"Nancy Devlin," replied Sam. "Violinist, just like Waterbury said. Worked wherever she could, private or public entertaining. Chap from the bureau said she was mighty good. I've got it all ready for the early morning edition, with a column about my own clever work in the arrest of Evans Mathews, popular member of the young social set!"

Nancy Devlin. One absurd and haunting horror was removed from his mind. He *knew* now that those girls did not bear the names he himself had given to his phantoms.

"This Nancy dame came from Ruthersford, or anyhow, that's where she registered; and the bureau said if we sent a man down they could give us what information they had. Guess she had no folks. Waterbury left on the first train and to-morrow I'm off to this place where the newspaper in the second lady's slipper was printed—this Waterville burg. Find a thread that connects Mathews with either of these dames, and—good night!"

Larry was in an absolutely miserable

frame of mind. He did not know whether he wished the investigation to succeed or not. If it did not soon uncover the criminal, that dread horror that stalked about Crime Island and struck without warning, another Saturday night might see the thing repeated with Molly or Bertha or Mary as the victim. And if he received one of those terrible notes warning him of the murder tryst, he would have to go, for fear the name of his ghost girl left somewhere as usual about the body, would be discovered by the police!

No, come what might, he could not face another week, those girls still on the pay roll, the criminal at large, and Cade in his office, receiving pay envelopes for girls who would never ask for them! Cade was a blundering ass. He would go straight to the treasurer for advice.

"You see," Sam was going on, "if we find out where these girls live, even if we can't get any trace of the murderer there, we can maybe learn what lured them here to Great Falls Island. Sure we can. They've even got Mathews' dog locked up."

"And so Mathews doesn't seem bothered?"

"Nary a bit," Sam shook his head. "He sent for his lawyer and is sitting pretty. But, gosh, his dog was there! We have evidence plain as can be, and that dog is never far from him!"

"But he would be a fool to take his dog!" blurted Larry.

"Man, if the dog bounded after him into a boat, he could better take him than make a racket trying to get him to stay ashore. And the dog was with Mathews at the Sheldon house. Everybody knows that. Plenty of people saw him, the great, big brute. He is as hard to hide as mine."

As Sam spoke he took a letter from his pocket, and paused before a mail box.

"Promised to mail this for Beth," he

nodded, and slipped the envelope into the box. "Now there's a girl. Smart as they come. Well, so long. I won't see you again until I get back from this Waterville burg."

Larry stood still, watching Sam and his dog vanish down the street. His knees shook and a chill raced down his spine, while the stately trees before him

seemed to waltz erratically about. As Sam held the letter Beth Carlin had asked him to mail, he had unconsciously read the address and now it was burned into his brain and it danced before him in the moonlight.

Written on it was the address: "MacDonald & Bowen, Analytical Chemists, Blank Street, New York City."

To be concluded in next week's issue of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE.



BIG JAIL-BREAK ATTEMPT FAILS

A BIG jail break at the prison at Media, Pennsylvania, although one of the most desperate attempts at a jail delivery in the history of the institution, failed of success after a hard battle, a few weeks ago. One hundred and ninety-six prisoners of both sexes were involved in the mutiny.

It is thought that the trouble was started by twenty-four incorrigible negro women prisoners who had been transferred from Sleighton Farms following an attempt at mutiny there. These women had been shouting and taunting the men prisoners, many of whom were also negroes, all night. At eight o'clock in the morning, seven ringleaders in the riot rushed out of their cells, armed with iron grate bars taken from a heater, and assumed control of the jail. These men were trusties and had been preparing for the revolt for some time previously. They ran up and down the tiers of cells, smashing the locks of the doors as they passed. The prisoners, released, came out, brandishing pieces of lead, table knives, forks and other improvised weapons that they had been hiding. The keepers, who were unarmed, dismayed by this show of force, fled from the cell corridors and locked the doors behind them.

The regular prison guards summoned help, but before it could arrive, the rebelling prisoners had wrecked the interior of the place. Doors were battered down, cots were torn from their fastenings, and bed clothing was destroyed. Two of the prisoners went to the kitchen and shoveled live coals from the big ranges, throwing them onto the bedding and starting several fires.

Fortunately for the prison authorities, it was court week in Media at the time, and there were several policemen in town from other places in the county. State police were also called in to help quell the riot, and citizens were drafted for service. Shotguns were obtained from the prison office, and a force of one hundred men—citizens, policemen, and State troopers—entered the disputed territory of the jail.

The battle was short and decisive. The improvised weapons of the prisoners stood little chance against the blackjacks and shotguns of the forces of law and order. The riot was quelled after it had been raging for an hour. Six prisoners were shot, one in the head, others in the legs and thighs. When the rioters were finally driven to their cells, it was found that the prison was so damaged that few of the cell doors could be locked, and it was necessary to set an armed guard of twenty-five men to see that no further outbreak occurred.



TELLTALE LUSTER

By H. M. Sutherland

Author of "The Best Crime Nose," etc.

A DEEP and breathless quiver of excitement swept the Cumberlands from the crest along the Kentucky border back to the valley of No Business Creek and beyond, sending the bearded and taciturn hillmen into hurried and low-voiced conferences which continued until far in the night. Women and children sat huddled about the smoldering fires in their cabins listening for the sound of footsteps, and yet dreading the message they knew such a herald would bring. The thing they had long expected and fervently hoped could be avoided had at last taken place. Stark, red violence had broken the shackles of a decade, and no one knew when it would stalk across their own doorstep.

With the rapidity of the wildfire that flashes through the dried pine-needle beds along the lee of the wind-swept ridges, the report of the long anticipated meeting of Sheriff Jim Rutherford and Brad Stover spread, so that

by nightfall there were none in the Devil's Apron country who had not heard the news. Brad Stover, hereditary leader of his clan, and implacable foe of the Rutherfords who lived on the lower reaches of No Business Creek, was dead, and the soft-voiced, whimsical, but thoroughly efficient sheriff, Jim Rutherford, was under arrest accused of the murder. Such was the tale that hard-riding messengers broadcast the length of the creek between the hours of sunset and darkness.

In the rear of old Jake Yaunce's general store at the forks of No Business, seated upon boxes and nail kegs and apparently unaware of the deepening shadows of night which were fast drawing in around them, and blotting out all vision, five men were gathered. Rather four men were seated while the fifth, "St. Bead" Starr, facetiously dubbed "The Patron Saint" of the moonshiners because of his sympathy with their cause, was standing near the stove talking, his long, white beard

looming vaguely in the darkness. Despite the fact that he had never become reconciled to a law that would prevent his neighbors from making a run of apple brandy for home consumption, he had long been a stanch and open friend to Sheriff Rutherford.

Although he had not been an eyewitness to the shooting, St. Bead had arrived on the scene not more than thirty minutes after it had taken place. The tragedy had occurred on the public highway eight miles down the creek just a few yards below the mouth of Abner's Branch. It had been St. Bead who had brought the news to Yaunce's store, and from his words the gathered hillmen realized that his loyalty to the sheriff was unshaken, even though it was apparent that the victim had been shot in the back.

Brad's death under the circumstances, so St. Bead had emphatically declared, was almost certain to bring on a renewal of the old Stover-Rutherford feud which ten years earlier had raged bitterly along the precipice-lined valley in which No Business Creek sang its soft, deceptive song of peace. But a truce had been declared through the agency of Jim Rutherford, later elected sheriff, and Brad Stover, respective leaders of their clans at the time, and a few sporadic outbursts during the last ten years had been quelled before feeling got out of control.

But Sheriff Jim and Brad Stover had made it a point to avoid each other all during those years. According to general report, they were each afraid to trust the other's peaceful intentions, while some declared that it was because they were afraid to trust themselves if they met face to face. Would impulse outweigh reason? That was the question that had remained always uppermost in the minds of the watchful on No Business. They had met at last—and Brad was dead.

"It shore looks bad for Jim." There

was a quaver of emotion in St. Bead's drawling tones. "Deputy Dutton says he heard the shots, an' when he got thar, he found sheriff bendin' over Brad's body in the middle of the road."

"Wasn't Dutton with 'em when it happened?" came a voice from the darkness behind the stove.

"He says he was back down the creek three, four hundred yards when the shootin' opened—three shots comin' close together. Told me he'd been follelin' the sheriff all day tryin' to catch up with him to get him to sign some papers he was takin' acrost border into Kaintucky. When I got thar he'd already put the sheriff under arrest an' was lookin' over the ground for evidence. He shore didn't lose any time after he got thar."

"He wouldn't," growled the voice behind the stove. "He's been wantin' the sheriff's job for four years, an' luck jest natur'ly played into his hands."

"What did sheriff have to say?" asked another of the hillmen.

St. Bead was silent for several seconds, and the stillness in the room deepened, broken only by the mournful call of a giant owl to its mate somewhere out along the mountainside.

"Boys," declared St. Bead at last, "I'm goin' to tell ye all I know about this business. I'm trustin' ye, but I'm takin' the precaution of askin' ye to keep quiet about what I'm tellin' ye till I say the word. I talked with Sheriff Jim while Dutton was makin' his examination, an' Jim swears he never done it. He was tellin' the truth, boys, if ever I heard a man tell it, but it looks like the facts in the case are such that he's nigh about shore to be convicted."

"If Brad was shot in the back, Sheriff Jim didn't do it," declared old Jake, the storekeeper, loyally.

"He was hit onct in the back, onct in the right cheek an' onct in the right hand—all done by a thirty-eight pistol

as best I could tell. Me an' Dutton found one of the bullets. Still we wa'n't right shore that more'n two bullets hit him. Looks like the same bullet that went through his right hand caught him in the right cheek—that he had his gun on a level with his face tryin' to shoot at the time. He did shoot once for thar was a empty shell in his gun, but he must 'a' missed. Both Sheriff Jim an' Dutton say that only three shots was fired—one at first an' then two clost together."

"Whar'd sheriff say he was when the shootin' started?" queried the voice behind the stove.

"Jest aroun' a bend in the road about a hundred and fifty yards away, in the same direction Dutton says he was. Jim told me that he spurred up an' found Brad layin' on the ground, dead, his gun in his hand an' a leetle trace of smoke still oozin' from the barrel. Some five or ten minutes later Dutton rode up. Knowin' the feelin' between sheriff an' Brad, Dutton says he never thought anything but that Jim had plugged him, but that he figgered 'twas a fair fight till he saw that Brad had been shot in the back. That bullet's still in him. Me an' Dutton found t'other bullet whar it had come outta his neck after passin' through his cheek an' had lodged in his coat collar. It fits sheriff Jim's thirty-eight special."

"Seems like Dutton was a leetle mite hasty in makin' his arrest," suggested old Jake thoughtfully. "He might 'a' waited for the grand jury to make the indictment—or at least till the coroner held the inquest."

"Sheriff says he don't blame Dutton none, him bein' a deputy sheriff an' havin' his duty to perform as he sees fit. Jim figgered he'd 'a' done the same thing if he'd 'a' found a man bendin' over the body of his enemy that way."

"When's the inquest to be held?" demanded Jake.

"To-mor' mornin' at ten o'clock.

Leastwise that's the hour set—if they can get the doctor thar to make his examination."

"The way I figger it," broke in a new voice from the shadows across the room, "it don't make no diff'rence which way the cat jumps, thar'll be hell to pay on No Business. If the cor'ner says Brad come to his 'death at the hands of Sheriff Jim, or if he finds that 'twas done by some unknown party, 'twill be all the same an' the ol' war'll jest natur'llly bust loose ag'in. For years I've been afeard this was goin' to come an' I reckon it's too late to try to head it off now."

"Mebbe not, Sim," replied St. Bead softly. "I ain't expectin' trouble for a few days anyhow. Neither side is goin' to take action till they get their bearin's. If it's proved that Sheriff Jim did do it, then we can get ready, but the Stovers know Brad had a lot of enemies an' several of 'em wouldn't 'a' been too good to 'a' took a pot shot at Brad from the bushes if they got a good chance. But if the Stovers are convinced that Sheriff Jim did plant a bullet in Brad's back they'll pull the county jail down so quick ye won't know what's happenin'."

"Are ye right shore they won't do that anyhow—to-night?" asked old Jake doubtfully.

"Reasonably shore. I had a talk with 'Red Dave' as I come up the creek a while ago, an' he says he feels certain he can hold 'em in check till the preliminary hearin' anyhow—or as long as he can manage to keep 'em in doubt as to the man who done the shootin'. An', boys, that's our job. We've got to help him keep that gang of fire-an'-tow devils guessin' or thar's goin' to be a lynchin' bee follered by the worst war this county ever seen. I ain't got nothin' much to work on, boys, but I'm hopin' that by trial day in circuit court—or before that—that we can be able to settle this trouble peaceful an' bloodless,

but it's only a hope. I'm goin' to see Sheriff Jim through, an' if I need any help, I'm goin' to call——"

"But, Bead," interrupted Jake, "if ye don't think Sheriff Jim done it, who are ye suspicionin'?"

"I'm tryin' not to suspicion anybody, so's I can keep a clear, unbiased mind till I learn somethin' definite."

"Wa'n't thar no tracks in the roads?" queried another of the hillmen.

"No. If ye recollect, that stretch of road jest below the mouth of Abner's Branch lays on a bed of slate an' shale, an' the rains have washed the dirt off, leavin' the surface solid. Brad was killed near the upper end of that slate, an' as far as I could see thar wa'n't any tracks except them made by Jim's hoss whar he hitched him to a pawpaw bush. But from the way Brad fell I figgered he'd been shot from the bushes on the upper side of the road. I looked in thar a leetle, but the ground is covered with a thick coat of moss which leaves no sign."

"Whar'd they take Brad's body?" asked Jake when St. Bead had grown silent.

"They can't move it till after the inquest," explained St. Bead. "Law won't let 'em touch it. Thar's forty or fifty Stovers campin' thar to-night."

"Say, Bead!" exploded one of his listeners, looming closer. "Two Stovers put together to-night means trouble, an' forty of 'em in the same place—why, man, thar ain't no power can stop 'em once they get worked up the right heat. Is 'Brandy Jack' with 'em?"

"Uh-huh!" grunted St. Bead, apparently without interest.

"I reckon ye shorely understand that he's the firebrand to light the fuse, don't ye, Bead? We'd best hurry down thar an' do what we can befo' it's too late—if it ain't too late already."

"Hold yore potato, Sim," advised St. Bead softly. "I sent Preacher

'Lige Haines down thar an' two or three more good men, an' I've got an idee that if anybody can hold 'em, Preacher 'Lige can. I'm afeard our presence thar to-night might not be the best thing, boys, because most of us has been a mite too friendly with Sheriff Jim to make us loved by the Stovers. Preacher 'Lige and Red Dave are the only two men in the county who have a chanct of being able to handle that situation, an' I reckon we'd best leave 'em be. Besides, Brandy Jack don't stand so high with the other Stovers right now—not since that last raid of the revenueurs on Lick Creek. Some of them think Brandy Jack turned them stills up to the officers to get even with Brad an' his pa on account of that fuss they had a few months ago."

"Ye're right, as allus, Bead," agreed Jake, arising and lighting a smoky kerosene lamp. "I can shake down pallets for all ye boys to sleep here to-night, if ye want." He glanced at the four men questioningly.

It was apparent that the imminence of trouble on No Business urged each man to go to his home as quickly as possible, the instinct of protection paramount, for none of them knew what the dawn of the next day might bring. Silently the three hillmen slipped through the door into the night, leaving St. Bead and old Jake, the Damon and Pythias of the Cumberlands, alone to their discussion of the impending danger which was fast closing in about the third member of a tri-cornered and lasting friendship of a half century's duration—Sheriff Jim Rutherford.

When the county coroner arrived for the inquest shortly before ten o'clock the following morning, he found some three hundred men waiting for him—practically the entire population of the Devil's Apron country. For the most part these spectators were gathered in small knots under the shade of the trees

along the roadside, talking in low, guarded tones, and furtively watching the rival factions who remained a respectful distance from each other, neither clan deeming it wise to tempt the other.

About Brad's sheet-shrouded body stood the Stovers, tall, lean, and sandy-haired, apparently unaware of the presence of the dark, saturnine Rutherfords. A dozen or so repeating rifles were visible in both factions, and every one instinctively knew that the others were armed to the teeth, and that, despite their seeming carelessness and indifference, the slightest movement on the part of any one of them would be the signal for the worst clash the Devil's Apron had ever known.

Red Dave had gathered about him the leaders of the clan, and mingling with them were Preacher 'Lige Haines, and Harve Cantrell, a justice of the peace whom both factions knew and respected as a fair-minded, fearless man. Seeing this, St. Bead drew a deep breath of relief, and motioned old Jake to one side.

"Preacher 'Lige has 'em onder control," he whispered, "an' if that fool coroner doctor uses his head ever'-thing'll slide off smooth as silk. Brandy Jack's skulkin' over thar at the ford of the creek, an' thar's only two other lads with him. He's plum' harmless for the time bein'."

"I hope ye're right, Bead," echoed Jake fervently, casting an eye out toward the creek.

Brandy Jack, a lithe, tawny youth, still in his early twenties, advanced in a slow, swaggering stride out along the road toward his people. He was the stormy petrel of No Business, and twice previously his actions had almost precipitated the slumbering feud, but Preacher 'Lige, Red Dave, and old Brad himself had each time succeeded in averting the catastrophe.

It was generally understood that after

the last escapade Red Dave, Jack's father, had made him leave the State, but he had reappeared after a few weeks and had immediately engaged in a violent quarrel with old Brad in which, it had been rumored, several unveiled threats had been made. Both St. Bead and Jake knew that there was a lurking suspicion in the minds of many of the Stovers that Brandy Jack had ambushed his Uncle Brad, and that Sheriff Rutherford had arrived on the scene in time to get the blame. For that reason Brandy Jack had lost his worshipful following temporarily, and with suspicion hanging over him he lurked in the background.

The county coroner, a florid, bombastic doctor from the county seat, lost no time in getting the inquest started. After a brief glance over the crowd he summoned a coroner's jury to assist him, and in this selection he showed that he possessed a working knowledge of the situation, and that he could be depended upon to handle it wisely. His jury consisted of Preacher 'Lige Haines, Harve Cantrell, the justice of the peace, Lee Douthat, a deputy sheriff appointed by Rutherford, but related to the Stovers, and three rivermen whose curiosity had drawn them up from the Indian River operations.

Deputy Bill Dutton rode up soon after the examination of the body got under way, having ridden over from the county seat to testify at the inquest, and St. Bead resisted the impulse to go over and ask what had been done with the prisoner. Dutton remained aloof while the jury and the coroner made their investigation which included a careful study of the wounds, probing, and a close scrutiny of the surrounding woods and thickets. Then, with the justice of the peace as spokesman, they questioned Deputy Dutton for several minutes and the replies of that officer seemed to the spectators both brief and decisive.

"If they'll jest keep Sheriff Jim's name outta the verdict," breathed St. Bead softly, and old Jake nodded in somber thoughtfulness.

At last the coroner stepped out from the others and read the verdict for the benefit of the curious. Apparently he realized the necessity of making known to those men the results of his findings.

"We, the coroner's jury, having been duly summoned and sworn, have assembled on this, the twenty-first day of October, 1925, to investigate and inquire into the death of Bradford Stover, and after due examination and questioning of such witnesses as were cognizant of any of the facts in the case, do hereby find and declare that the aforesaid Bradford Stover met death through certain gunshot wounds inflicted upon his person by an unknown party or parties.

"CHARLES VAUDNEY, M. D., Coroner."

"Good!" ejaculated St. Bead relievedly, and with a deep breath relaxed the tension that had held him stiffly poised.

The crowd remained motionless until six of the Stovers approached with a crude pole litter and silently bore the body away in the direction of the Stover settlement. Then in small knots the gathering broke up, mounted their horses and disappeared, each man apparently feeling a degree of security that he had not anticipated. The clash between the two clans had been averted, at least temporarily, but with Brandy Jack and a few of the younger hot-heads fomenting the unrest that must perforce follow the shooting, it was only a matter of days until, as old Jake put it, "red hell would be ridin' high." None realized this more vividly than did St. Bead who determined to give his every effort to Sheriff Jim until the end.

The long shadows of sunset were slanting across the courthouse square when St. Bead entered the county seat that afternoon and hitched his horse to the rack in the alley near the bank. He found the prosecuting attorney, Rockby

Harrison, in his office in the courthouse, and the latter greeted him with a warm handclasp.

"I've been waiting for you to come, Uncle Bead," he said in a tone that bespoke his liking for the old hillman. "Wanted to talk with you about Sheriff Jim's case before I heard any one else."

"That's what I come for, Rock." St. Bead took the proffered chair. "Whar is Jim?"

"In jail—held without bail until the preliminary hearing."

"Who swore out the warrant?"

"Bill Dutton."

"He was in a mighty big hurry," complained St. Bead with a frown. "Seems like he could 'a' waited till the grand jury convened anyhow. Is Jim still denyin' that he done it?"

"Yes, and I believe him." Rockby stared unseeingly out toward the jail building at the far corner of the square.

"He didn't do it, Rock," said St. Bead with conviction. "He ain't the sort to shoot a man in the back. But how are we goin' to prove that?"

"I wish I knew." Rockby's shrug plainly expressed his impotence. "We'll go out and have a talk with him. He sent for me a little while ago and told me to bring over the holster and cartridge belt which Dutton took off him and left with me this morning."

"What's the ca'tridge belt got to do with it?" questioned St. Bead in surprise.

"Looks like that belt is liable to convict sheriff," replied Rockby enigmatically, as he turned toward a filing cabinet on the other side of the room.

From one of the locked drawers he brought out a heavy gun and holster together with a cartridge-studded belt. Then, fumbling among some papers in the bottom of the drawer he finally produced a small, tin box which rattled in his hand as he brought it and the belt over and laid them down on the table.

"This is the sheriff's gun," explained Rockby, his young face creased with deep lines of worry. "Dutton placed it in my keeping this morning, and I've been examining it at odd moments today. It has been fired recently because there's freshly burned powder in the barrel, but there were no empty shells in the cylinder—every place filled except where the hammer rested, for Jim was always careful with a gun. It is the same caliber as the gun which killed Brad, apparently, but if Jim did do the shooting, he would have had plenty of time to reload."

"What's in the tin box, Rock?" asked St. Bead curiously, pointing toward it on the table.

"The bullets that killed Brad. Dutton gave them to me about an hour ago, and he explained their significance to me.

"Those two bullets are going to draw a damned tight web about Sheriff Jim, or I miss my guess. I've got to prosecute this case to the best of my ability, but it is also my duty to work just as hard to prove a man not guilty if there is any doubt about it."

"Let's see them bullets." St. Bead reached for the box and opened the lid.

Removing the two bullets, both leaden, he held them up the light and turned them slowly about.

"You can see, Uncle Bead," explained Rockby, leaning close, "that both of these bullets are dull on one side and bright and shiny on the other. In other words, one side of each of them has been rubbed until it glistens. This bullet"—pointing toward one in the palm of St. Bead's hand—"is the one you and Dutton found lodged in Brad's coat collar. See where it's dented here! That apparently was done by coming in contact with the cheek bone. At least that's what Doctor Vaudney says.

"If that was the only bullet, Dutton's argument wouldn't be worth a red

cent," he continued. "But look at this other bullet! See! It glistens just like the other on one side, but has no other mark on it. I have the word of the doctor that this second bullet did not strike a bone, but was a clean flesh wound, entering between two ribs in Brad's back and lodging in the strong stomach muscles in front from which he removed it at the inquest. The doctor states that this second bullet could not possibly have come in contact with anything that would have made it shine like that.

"Now that's where this cartridge belt comes in. Dutton called my attention to it when he got back from the inquest, and I'll have to admit that Dutton is showing some rather clear headwork in this case, no matter where our sympathies may be. We'll have to give him credit for that. Take a look at this belt!" He tossed the articles across the table to St. Bead who picked them up curiously.

The belt was made of some sort of pliable leather, approximately three inches in width, and all the way around the center ran a series of leathern loops which held the cartridges. These loops were stitched to a narrow strip of horsehide which in turn had been sewn to the belt, but this latter stitching had been ripped loose for a distance of probably eighteen inches on one side, permitting the loops and cartridges to rub against the belt. The surface of the leather just beneath the bullets was spotted with a dull black where the lead had marked it, and eight loops of this section of the belt were empty. St. Bead stared at this for an instant before complete understanding broke over him. Then he looked into the sheriff's gun and found what he knew would be there—a round of the burnished cartridges.

"I see," half whispered St. Bead after a full minute of tense silence. "That's mighty conclusive evidence.

Some folks might say 'twas unbeatable. Shore looks bad for Jim."

With narrowed eyes and fingers that refused to remain still, the old man examined one of the cartridges from the belt minutely, and then gave his attention to one of the two bullets which Rockby had replaced in the box. Rockby lighted his pipe and leaned back in a chair, watching St. Bead closely but saying nothing. If the old hillman made any discovery during his examination, his features gave no indication of it. At last he replaced the two bullets, closed the box and straightened.

"Let's go over an' talk with Jim a leetle," he suggested, and Rockby acquiesced with a nod.

Rutherford had a cell in the unoccupied end of the tier, and as Rockby and St. Bead stopped before the door, he arose from his bunk and came forward to meet them.

"Hello, boys!" he greeted them quietly. "Kinda figgered ye'd show up to-day, Bead." He thrust out his gnarled old hand through the bars and St. Bead met it with a clasp that lingered.

"Would 'a' come sooner, Jim," replied St. Bead softly, "but I was sort of busy last night an' this mornin'."

"Knowed ye would be."

The sheriff rested his arm on one of the steel crosspieces of the door and leaned forward. His other hand was tugging nervously at his black, drooping mustaches, as was his habit when troubled, and his kindly, blue eyes under their shaggy brows caught St. Bead's gaze and held it. Gone was every vestige of the old, humorous, quizzical smile, and in its place was a hint of troubled fear and worry that went straight to St. Bead's heart.

"Any news, Bead?" asked the sheriff huskily.

St. Bead shook his head, not trusting himself to speak just then, and Rutherford turned to Rockby.

"Some of the boys have been tellin' me about them bullets, Rock," he said, glancing down at the holster and gun which the prosecuting attorney was carrying. "Doc was here a while ago. Mind if I look at 'em?"

"Of course not, Jim."

He offered the holster and tin box to the sheriff, but the latter shook his head with a hint of a smile.

"'Tain't exactly customary for a prisoner to have a gun, Rock," he said. "Jest hold 'em whar I can see 'em clost."

He glanced perfunctorily at the belt and worn cartridges in it, his brow corrugated with thought. Rockby silently opened the tin box and placed it in one of the apertures between the crossed steel bars of the door. As silently the sheriff examined them, but whatever were his thoughts he said nothing. At last he closed the box and returned it to the prosecuting attorney.

"What do you think of it, Jim?" asked Rockby after a slight pause.

The sheriff shrugged, a hint of a smile appearing in the corners of his eyes for an instant.

"I'm kinda like Bart Holbrook was that time he got stuck in the wild-cat den," he replied slowly. "I ain't thinkin'—I'm jest hopin'."

St. Bead stepped in close to the door, and lowered his voice so that the other prisoners down the corridor could not overhear.

"Jim, we might as well get down to bed rock," he declared. "We both know that bad trouble is brewin' on the Devil's Apron an' it's up to us to prove that ye didn't down Brad—an' prove it quick. Dave an' Preacher 'Lige are doin' their best to hold the Stovers in, but they can't do it long. Ye know that, Jim."

The sheriff nodded somberly.

"When does yore preliminary hearin' come off?" demanded St. Bead.

"Sate'day mornin'."

"An' to-day's Tuesday. Gives us three days to do a lot of work." He paused and stared intently at Rutherford. "Is thar anything ye haven't told us yet, Jim?"

"Not a thing, Bead."

"Didn't see anything of Brandy Jack near whar the shootin' took place yeste'day?"

"Not a sign."

"Ye knew that Brandy Jack had trouble with Brad, didn't ye?"

"Heard about it, but 'tain't likely that one Stover'd shoot another. It ain't been done before."

"Did ye hear that Brad turned John Hen Molans' still up to the raiders a few weeks ago?"

"He done that all right," admitted the sheriff, shaking his head slowly, "but I reckon John Hen didn't kill Brad. I seen him drivin' a wagon down No Business that mornin' twelve miles away. Was ye suspicionin' him?"

"Wouldn't he 'a' had time to get back thar by the time of the shootin'?"

"I reckon he might, but——"

"We can't afford to overlook nothin' now, Jim. Is thar anybody else who might 'a' had a reason for waylayin' Brad?"

The sheriff was silent for probably thirty seconds.

"I reckon not, Bead."

"Have ye got any enemies yoreself, Jim—anybody who'd do a thing like that if they thought they could shunt the blame off on ye?"

"Can't say about that, Bead. I reckon I've made some enemies, but I can't figger out how they could 'a' knowed so much about my movements, an' Dutton's an' Brad's to time us that way. No, Bead, I guess ye'll have to figger on somethin' else."

"How come Dutton wa'n't ridin' with ye when it happened, Jim?" persisted St. Bead.

"He was servin' some papers back in the Cranesnest country, an' I was to

meet him to-day at Jake Yaunce's store."

"He must 'a' been ridin' ahead of time to be so clost on yore heels yeste'day evenin'."

"Another deputy had turned some warrants over to him which had to be carried acrost the State line. He was huntin' me to get me to sign 'em yeste'day."

"Did he know about that ripped cartridge belt—I mean before yeste'day?"

Rutherford's eyebrows went up questioningly. "Shore now, ye ain't figgerin' 'twas Bill Dutton, are ye?" he asked in surprise.

"I told ye I was tryin' to overlook nothin', Jim. Did he know about that belt?"

"Yeah, I reckon he did. One day about three weeks ago when we was tryin' to serve a warrant on Bud Carson, an' was crawlin' up to the house about daylight, that belt was screechin' so loud when I moved that Dutton told me I'd better take it off an' leave it behind before Bud heard it. I done that, an' when we brought Bud out, I had to send Dutton back for the belt."

St. Bead stroked his beard meditatively, deeply immersed in his thoughts, and neither Rockby nor Rutherford saw fit to disturb him.

"Ye're shore ye saw nor heard nothin' up thar on the road when ye found Brad's body, are ye, Jim?" he queried at last.

"Not a thing, Bead."

"Didn't ye say 'twas three shots ye heard?"

"Shore."

"An' thar was one empty shell in Brad's gun, wa'n't thar?"

Rutherford grunted an affirmative.

"Ye allus shoot from yore hip, don't ye, Jim? I've seen ye shoot that way lots of times, but I never did see ye raise yore gun to the level of yore eyes, as best I recollect."

"From the hip. I never sight."

St. Bead thrust his hand through the bars and dropped it on the sheriff's arm.

"I'll do what I can, Jim," he said simply, and then turned to the prosecuting attorney. "Can ye arrange for bail, Rock? I reckon my land's good for twenty thousand dollars."

"Not till after the preliminary trial, and then it depends on the trial justices." Rockby seemed to be apologizing for that which was beyond his control. "I tried to get Jim to let me set the hearing for to-day, but he wanted to wait until Saturday."

"Wanted to get word to ye an' Jake an' Preacher 'Lige," broke in Rutherford, "an' give ye a leetle time to look aroun'. It looks like a tight place for me, Bead, but I'm willin' to put my chances in yore's an' Jake's and 'Lige's hands. Ye boys know that I didn't shoot Brad—in the back—an' if the three of ye can't find a road outta this tangle, I reckon 'twon't be no use in tryin' to get out."

"We'll do all we can, Jim," repeated St. Bead, letting his hand rest for an instant on Rutherford's, and then quickly turning away to hide the mist that dimmed his eyes.

"All right, boys!" called the sheriff cheerfully. "I'll see ye both at the trial Sate'day. I've talked with Lawyer Halliday."

A few moments later St. Bead mounted his horse and turned toward the deepening shadows which were slowly shrouding the distant Devil's Apron hills with the mantle of night. As he turned the corner into Main Street he glanced back toward the cavernous jail, and his gnarled old hands which rested on the pommel of his saddle were clinched so tightly that the knuckles showed white through the weather-tanned skin.

Dawn of the day of Rutherford's preliminary trial saw the general exodus

of the Devil's Apron country toward the county seat. No Stover loitered in his secluded cabin, and no Rutherford, man or boy, was permitted to remain behind. But canny hillmen that they were, each knew of the movements of the other faction, and they were careful to prevent a possible clash between any of the outriders, for both sides realized that a single overt act would set the Cumberlands ablaze.

When the Stovers arrived at the courthouse and found the doors still closed, they repaired to the store of a kinsman across the street from the hotel, and hitching their horses to the rack in the alley, they disappeared inside—all save Brandy Jack and two companions who loafed outside near the door, as if they had been placed on guard. Full two score were inside the building, and must have taxed it to its capacity, yet no sound came from it.

A quarter of an hour later the Rutherford cavalcade trotted slowly down the street, led by the gaunt, cadaverous Gideon, acknowledged chief of the clan since Jim had been elected sheriff, and reputed to be the most dangerous man in the hill country. He was a silent, slow-thinking man, but once aroused, his actions were instinctive and lightning swift, outstripping his thoughts and leaving him a machine which for deadliness was unrivaled in the annals of Devil's Apron history.

The fifty men and their leader dismounted and took up their position on the steps before the courthouse door, some sitting on the steps and others lounging against the columns and walls. Although they appeared to be ignoring utterly the little store down the street, there was not one of them whose alertness would not have warned him in a split second of any unusual movement over there.

The townsfolk had, immediately and quietly, gone under cover, and by this action indicated that they stood unan-

imously for neutrality. Save for a furtively moving window curtain here and there in the surrounding homes and the occasional slamming of a door, the town appeared absolutely deserted. A boy, four or five years old, rode his tricycle around the corner of a near-by residence and headed through the open gate into the street where he paused irresolutely for an instant as if debating which direction to go. At that point there came a piercing scream from inside the house, and a woman darted out, snatched up the child, and fled precipitately. The Rutherfords, to a man, wheeled and watched her, but no word of comment was offered.

Just then the courthouse clock struck ten, the hour set for the trial, and almost simultaneously there appeared a small knot of closely packed men at the jail door. St. Bead, Preacher 'Lige and Deputy Dutton were in the van while just behind them came Sheriff Rutherford, another deputy, old Jake Yaunce, and the prosecuting attorney. With unhurried pace they advanced across the square and entered the courthouse through a side door.

When the janitor opened the front portals the Rutherfords streamed silently inside and filed up the stairway into the courtroom, taking their seats on the right of the aisle down near the front. A few minutes later the Stovers clumped heavily through the door with Brandy Jack and Red Dave side by side. They had evidently regained the favor of the leaders and, at the sight of the tawny, lithe form sliding along the row of seats so smoothly and effortlessly, St. Bead felt a premonition of danger.

The Stovers cleverly selected a position near the door, and slightly behind the Rutherfords, throwing the latter to a distinct disadvantage, which did not pass unnoticed by them, for there came a perceptible shifting of positions to facilitate a quick defense in case the

fusillade opened. Then both clans settled down to await developments.

Three trial justices were sitting on the bench and they were palpably nervous, whispering to each other hoarsely, and vainly trying to keep their attention riveted upon the documents they were considering. All of these justices were farmers living close in around the county seat, and their sudden projection into that livid play of unbridled emotions had stripped them of their confidence and ease. One of them arose and opened the door leading to a small consultation room just behind them, and this action brought a derisive grin to Brandy Jack's face.

The tensity that surcharged the room was evidenced by the lawyers for both the prosecution and defense, for the faces of these two carried an unwonted expression of gravity and seriousness. For the State "Roarin' Rufe" McCay, vitriolic and eminently successful, took charge, assisted by Rockby Harrison, while at the defense table sat the quiet, dryly humorous Halliday, himself a hillman, and one of the sheriff's closest friends.

Dutton and two other deputies were seated in the jury box, slightly to one side and above the level of the floor so that they would be in position to catch the slightest movement anywhere in the crowd. They, as well as every one else in the room, were always conscious of the fact that they were sitting on the crest of a volcano, for, with Brandy Jack in control of the more dangerous element of the Stover faction, no power could hold them long in check. A single word—the slightest move—could touch the fuse.

It was with a feeling of deep relief that the court and participants in the trial saw the entrance of ten or twelve men, known throughout the Cumberland for their tested courage, among them Harve Cantrell, two revenue officers, Bart Honeycutt, sheriff of the

adjoining county across in Kentucky, and several of his deputies. It had been Rockby's plan to call on these men to attend the hearing in an effort to prevent the inevitable clash, but there were few in the room who really believed that any ten men alive could dam the flood once it broke.

The hearing got quickly under way with Roarin' Rufe hiding his apprehensions behind a cloud of legal phraseology uttered in no uncertain terms. He stated his case in a burst of vituperative oratory, so defiant that it brought a threatening stir among the Rutherfords just behind him. Following Halliday's opening statement in which he promised a complete proof of the innocence of his client, Roarin' Rufe laughed sarcastically and called his two witnesses—the coroner and Deputy Dutton.

Doctor Vaudney's testimony was succinct and to the point. He described the position of the three wounds in the body of the deceased, told of the bullet that he had extracted at the inquest, and stated that it was his opinion that the victim had lived probably five minutes after he had been shot in the back—that such a wound would not be likely to kill instantly. He further stated that from the position in which the body was found, he believed that he had been shot in the back first and had whirled and received his other wounds facing his attacker. Halliday refused to cross-examine, but requested the witness to remain in the hall on the chance that he might need him later. Then McCay, with a flourish, called Dutton to the chair.

The deputy repeated in detail the incidents of the day of the shooting in a clear and concise manner, telling how he found Sheriff Rutherford bending over the body of the deceased, how he quickly discovered that Brad had been shot in the back, and how he then felt it his duty to place Rutherford under

arrest. He declared that he had long known of the enmity that had existed between the deceased and the accused, and asserted that he had been expecting this clash for years.

Then McCay sprang his bomb on the waiting crowd—the bullets and the cartridge belt. He placed the two bullets in the hands of the justices and asked that they examine them closely and compare them with the cartridges in the belt. For a space of what seemed to be an endless minute the justices leaned forward staring at the exhibits with undisguised interest while McCay explained the purport of them, and fastened the shackles of guilt upon the accused.

A ripple of excitement ran through the Stover faction when the meaning of this new evidence pierced their understanding. The slight murmur steadily increased to a low, angry buzz, and one of the justices rapped sharply, but vainly, on the table for order. A certain tensity on the part of the Rutherfords showed that they realized the nearness of the dreaded climax, and that they were ready for it. Then a strange, hushed silence settled over the room—the deadly calm that presages the sudden burst of pent emotions. Men in that room lived an eternity in those ten pregnant seconds.

At that instant Halliday arose to his feet and faced the crowd with a half smile playing about the corners of his mouth.

"Steady, boys!" he drawled softly. "I'm askin' you for one moment's attention, and if you don't give it to me, you'll regret it to the last day of your lives."

A slight relaxation of the tension greeted his unusual statement, and with a nod of thanks, he turned to McCay.

"Are you through with the witness?" he asked sharply.

"I am."

He then nodded a dismissal to the

deputy who returned to the jury box and resumed his seat.

"Call Doctor Vaudney," ordered Halliday, and the coroner apparently heard him from the hall, for he reappeared immediately and came forward.

"You noted the positions of the wounds on Brad Stover's body, I believe," stated Halliday.

"Yes."

"Did I understand you to say that there was one wound in Brad's right hand and another in his right cheek and that it was your opinion that both wounds were made by the same bullet?"

"Yes, I said that," admitted the coroner. "Such a thing is possible, but I wouldn't have thought that if I had not heard that only three shots were fired and one of them was by Stover. That leaves only two bullets that could have hit Stover and one of them was in the back. I was merely trying to account for the three wounds."

"In what position would the victim have had to be in order that the same bullet could hit him in the right hand and the right cheek?"

"He could be facing his attacker with his gun raised to the level of his eyes—or at least his hand raised to about that level."

"Did the wound in his hand show that the bullet had struck a bone and could have been deflected from its line of flight?"

"No. It plowed through the fleshy part of his hand and struck no bone."

"When it passed through the cheek and neck, did it range up or down?"

"Neither. It ranged straight across, coming out at the same height it entered his face."

"The land about that place is perfectly level for fifty yards or more on either side of the road, isn't it?"

"I should say that that is about correct."

"That will do, doctor."

Roarin' Rufe waved the witness away with a depreciatory gesture.

"Come around, Dutton," called Halliday, and the latter complied noiselessly.

"You've seen the prisoner shoot his revolver a number of times, haven't you, Dutton?"

"Shore. Hundreds of times."

"How does he shoot?"

"What do ye mean?"

"Does he shoot from his hip or from the level with his eyes?"

"Hip."

"Always?"

"Always."

"Then can you explain to me how—if the ground is perfectly level, and if the bullet was not deflected by a bone as the doctor says—can you tell me how that bullet could have struck Brad's hand and ranged straight across his cheek, if it had been fired from Rutherford's hip? Doesn't it stand to reason that the ball would have ranged upward since it was started from that low a point?"

Dutton stared at Halliday for a space of several seconds, and then shook his head in negation.

"Don't know," he replied at last, "unless he shot him from the back of his hoss."

"From that height, wouldn't the bullet have ranged downward?"

Dutton offered no reply.

"That will do, Dutton," declared Halliday in a tone of satisfaction, and it was apparent to every one that he had scored a strong point. It was generally known that Sheriff Rutherford was a wonderfully accurate shot from the hip, and even the Stovers were impressed by the new turn of the evidence.

"With the permission of the prosecution," continued Halliday, "I'd like to introduce again those two bullets and the cartridge belt as evidence."

He stepped over, caught up the articles in question, and presented them

to the justices. Then he turned and smiled at the trio of old men—St. Bead, Preacher 'Lige and old Jake—who sat just outside the railing behind the defense table.

"St. Bead Starr, will you take the chair?" invited Halliday.

Every eye in the room was centered on the white-haired old hillman as he slowly arose and advanced through the gate to the seat indicated. Outwardly he was calm, emotionless, his face devoid of any definite expression, and but few in the crowd, if any, realized the intensity of the feelings hidden behind that masked exterior.

He seated himself heavily and faced the trial justices with his hands resting on his knees to still their trembling. The spectators, among whom there had spread a rumor that St. Bead was going to spring an unexpected coup, leaned forward in their seats, determined to miss no word of his evidence. Apparently the Stovers and Rutherfords for the moment forgot each other in their eager intentness.

"May I state to the court," began Halliday after a slight pause, "that this witness, St. Bead Starr, has been doing some private investigation in this case, and although it may be a bit irregular, I am going to ask the permission of the court to let him tell in his own words just what he has discovered. I have not had time to go over the case thoroughly with him, for he did not get here until less than an hour ago. St. Bead, will you tell the court just what you found?"

St. Bead sat stroking his long, white beard while the room breathlessly awaited his words.

"Let me first explain about them bullets," he began, pointing a trembling forefinger toward the exhibits on the table. "If yore eyes are plum' good, boys, ye'll notice that thar's a leetle difference between them bullets in the box an' them in the ca'tridge belt. Them

in the belt are worn slick an' smooth by the rubbin' of the leather. Ye can run yore finger over 'em an' see if I'm right." He waited until each of the trial justices did this. "Now take a look at them bullets in that leetle box," he continued. "They're rough instead of bein' slick an' smooth like t'others. Them two bullets never was in Sheriff Jim's belt, an' I can prove it to ye in a minute or two.

"Now I'm goin' to explain about somethin' else for a minute. The prosecutin' attorney over thar will tell ye that a leetle over a year ago Sheriff Rutherford was figgerin' on resignin' from his office to seek the appointment of district prohibition officer over the five counties j'inin' this county. His friends persuaded him out of that notion, but while he was thinkin' of it, the circuit judge made the statement that he would name a certain man sheriff in case Jim resigned. But t'other day Jim let it be known that he was goin' to run for sheriff next year, an' this other man knowed that he couldn't beat Jim for the nomination, but he was wantin' the office bad enough to do anything to get it.

"Now I'm goin' to get down to bed rock," shot the old man in staccato, turning and staring directly into the face of Deputy Dutton who had arisen in the jury box and was staring at St. Bead bewilderedly. There was a hunted, furtive expression on Dutton's face as he softly stepped down from the box and advanced to the center of the forum, never taking his eyes off St. Bead.

"Yeste'day evenin'," continued the witness in level tones, "me an' Jake an' Preacher 'Lige over thar paid a leetle visit to Deputy Bill Dutton's house, an', jest like we expected, we found that Bill wa'n't home. We made a search of his room an' we found—this."

With a sudden movement he produced a square of black-blotched sand-

paper which he tossed to the table before the justices while Dutton stared at it in a strained, tense manner.

"Take one of the ca'tridges which ain't been rubbed on the left side of that belt," suggested St. Bead, "an' rub it with that piece of sandpaper, an' then compare it with them two bullets in the box."

With an unexpected leap Dutton reached the table, snatched up the piece of sandpaper and held it before his eyes with hands that shook as if with palsy.

"It's a damn lie," he cried hoarsely. "I burned that piece of sandpaper!"

He straightened spasmodically, grew stiff, and over his face crept a distorted expression of fear and horror as he realized the import of his unconscious admission. For an instant he stood there swaying slightly, and then his right hand flashed toward his hip holster as he leaped over the railing.

The crowd with a single impulse came to its feet, and on the instant a

lithe, tawny form darted from among the Stovers, completely blocking Dutton's flight, and with the quickness of light Brandy Jack's two guns were resting against Dutton's belt. The latter crouched and was buried beneath an avalanche of Rutherfords led by Gideon, the dangerous.

For five minutes the three trial justices sought vainly to bring order out of the chaos, and at last they succeeded, but only after St. Bead had held up his hand and asked to "finish out his leetle spiel."

"I reckon Dutton told the truth, boys," he declared when he could make himself heard. "We found that piece of sandpaper in Dutton's house on the fireboard, but it hadn't been used when we found it. We rubbed some ca'tridges on it an' it all blacked up that way, an' I reckon that's what fooled him into confessin'—jest like me an' Jake was hopin'."

Silently Sheriff Jim held out his hand and St. Bead met it as silently.

NEW CURRENCY DIFFICULT TO COUNTERFEIT

COUNTERFEITING the currency of the United States—always a difficult and dangerous pastime—is to be made even more difficult to accomplish successfully, because of a new method of making engraved paper money that has recently been introduced at Washington. By the new process, it is expected that bank notes will last longer and stand rough usage better than those engraved under the old system.

A new type of plate has been adopted; this plate has a more durable surface and will not wear out as quickly as the old-style plate which was of case-hardened steel. Chromium is the metal that has brought about the change. It is exceedingly hard and although cheaper than nickel or steel, it gives sharper impressions. It is said that a layer of chromium two ten-thousandths of an inch thick, when deposited on the nickel surface of the plate, will make it four times as durable as the ordinary nickel plate and twice as durable as case-hardened steel.

The old-style plate of case-hardened steel gave from thirty to seventy thousand impressions, but the new chromium plate will print many more notes without needing replacement. The fact that changes of plates are not necessary will insure greater uniformity in all bills and will make counterfeits more easy to detect, as any deviation from the uniformity of the original design will be a sure indication of spuriousness. Thus is the way of the counterfeiter made harder and harder by the ingenuity of the men who manufacture Uncle Sam's currency.



THE GREEN SHADOW

(A Picaroon Story)
By Herman Landon

Author of "The Picaroon and the Pawn Ticket," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

THREATENED by Doctor Moffett with exposure of his association with one Forrester as the mysterious Mr. Graves in a swindling scheme, Virgil Ellsworth Castle is worried and helpless. After learning of her father's trouble, Adele receives a message to meet The Picaroon in Central Park. The Picaroon appears in the person of Martin Dale, and plans with Adele to defeat Moffett.

As the two talk they are able to identify Miss Conway with Mrs. Ferryman, who has been found murdered in her home—even while her husband was discussing mysterious occurrences in the house with Captain John Summers, who has sworn to capture The Picaroon, even though he suspects Dale. Ferryman is heartbroken over his wife's tragic return, for she has been missing four years.

That night Dale goes to Ferryman's house again, for it was here that Doctor Moffett interviewed Adele Castle, and becomes suspicious of Axelsson, the caretaker. Later he talks with Ferryman, but the sum total of his added information is not important. After his return home he receives a threat from Moffett, and later that night he is knocked unconscious while investigating an invisible prowler who flooded his rooms with green light. The next morning he meets Adele at her home, where is also her fiancé, Paul Ainsworth. Dale immediately suspects him of being Doctor Moffett.

For a third time Dale visits the Ferryman place, searching for further evidence of Moffett's presence, and hoping to find the papers with which the doctor intends to blackmail Castle. Investigating a secret panel, he discovers a valuable string of pearls, which he believes to be Moffett's. Pocketing these, he is frightened by a noise, and finds that he has been trapped. Summers, Ferryman, Axelsson, and police officers come into the room, but Dale is, of course, in the disguise of The Picaroon. Just as he is about to be searched he accuses Axelsson of the murder of Mrs. Ferryman, and in the ensuing surprise achieves his escape by throwing Axelsson out the window as a blind.

At lunch the next day Dale meets Summers, who is amazed at his boldness. Excusing himself, he finds that he is being shadowed, but he phones Adele Castle, nevertheless. She tells him that her father will be exposed if the stipulated price for silence is not paid within twenty-four hours.

CHAPTER XIII

PLOT AND COUNTERPLOT

FROM the telephone booth Dale taxied to his bank, arriving there just before closing time. In exchange for his personal check he received two one-thousand dollar notes and forty-eight

one-dollar bills. The accommodating bank clerk selected fresh, crisp currency and snapped a rubber band around it, forming a compact bundle about as thick as Dale's middle finger.

With a careless air Dale dropped the bundle into his inside coat pocket and went back to his taxi. His next stop was No. 262 Bank Street, and here he

paid and dismissed the driver. Without expecting a too cordial reception he ran up the steps and rang the bell. It was a new face that answered his summons—the face of a man considerably younger than Axelson. He was dark and lithe and slim, with sharp features and a cautious expression.

"Is Mr. Ferryman in?" he inquired.

"You will find him in the next house, sir, No. 260."

Dale studied the fellow for a moment. He reflected that Ferryman was not particularly fortunate in his selection of servants.

"You are new here, aren't you? What's become of Axelson?"

"Axelson is no longer here, sir. He left this morning." The servant started to close the door in Dale's face. "I doubt if Mr. Ferryman will see you, sir. He is not receiving callers to-day. But you might try—oh, here he comes."

A tall, bareheaded man appeared on the stoop of the adjoining house.

"Wish to see me?" he asked. "Oh, it's you, Mr. Dale." A chill crept into his voice. "I saw some one from the window, and I wondered. I can spare you a few minutes."

He came down the steps, crossed over to No. 262, and with frigid politeness motioned Dale to enter. They walked into the library. Ferryman was holding himself a little more erect than yesterday, but traces of shock and grief remained in his fine face.

"Be seated, Mr. Dale. I am rather surprised to see you after what happened here last night."

Dale smiled genially. "I saw Captain Summers at luncheon. Queer sort, Summers, physically and mentally. His head is too large, and there are too many crazy notions in it. He gave me a vague idea of what occurred in this house last night."

Ferryman regarded him suspiciously. "You were here, weren't you, in the rôle of The Picaroon?"

Dale laughed. "That's one of Summers' refreshingly original ideas. Well, when a man has a head as big as his, he has to fill the blank spaces with something."

Ferryman's eyes were still full of distrust. "Captain Summers telephoned me an hour ago. He had a very astounding report to make." A frown of perplexity gathered on his forehead. "The pearls have been recovered."

"Congratulations," Dale murmured.

"Oh, I didn't care greatly about the pearls. They are valuable, to be sure, but of what use are they to me now? My poor wife will never wear them again." His voice broke, but in a moment it gathered strength again. "There is only one thing I live for now, and that is to see that the murderer is properly punished."

Dale inclined his head sympathetically. "That's a natural sentiment, Mr. Ferryman. But tell me, you don't really believe that The Picaroon murdered her?"

The other man hesitated. His face showed a conflict between stern emotions and gentle ones, between grief and vindictiveness. "I am not convinced," he murmured. "It is strange that The Picaroon should have returned the pearls. And there are many other incongruities that complicate the matter." He raised his head a little. "I didn't like the way Axelson acted last night. In a twinkling, as I looked into his face, all my former feelings with regard to him changed. All at once I was filled with distrust. This morning I discharged him. I don't know whether or not I was justified."

Dale looked about the room which had been the scene of Miss Castle's interview with Doctor Moffett and of his own exciting encounter with Captain Summers last night. Something seemed to have disturbed its former state of order and neatness. Things were scattered about, the furniture had been dis-

arranged, there were signs of some one's hurried departure.

"Yes, I noticed it this morning," said Ferryman, following his glance. "I called Axelson's attention to it, and he acted sullen and discourteous. Then I discharged him. There is no longer any doubt in my mind but what certain persons have been making improper use of my house, possibly with Axelson's connivance. If so, I hope they are done for good."

He sighed. "You were inquiring about a certain Doctor Moffett the other day. Lately I have been thinking that perhaps such a person exists."

"You have learned something?" Dale asked quickly.

Ferryman hesitated. For just a moment he seemed inclined to take Dale into his confidence, and then his face closed up again.

"No, nothing definite. In fact, I have had only the vaguest sort of inkling. Besides"—with a glance over the confusion in the room—"all that appears to be happily ended now."

Dale frowned a little. Last night's excitement, together with the subsequent discharge of Axelson, had evidently prompted Doctor Moffett to make new arrangements in great haste. This development was not to Dale's liking. His task had not seemed so difficult as long as he knew where the enemy could be reached. Now he would have to trace him to his new quarters. Doctor Moffett had added elusiveness to his other formidable qualities. That would mean a new problem to solve and consequent delay.

In the midst of his reflections he found Ferryman regarding him with an intent, puzzled expression.

"You are a bewildering person, Mr. Dale," he now murmured with a faint, uncertain smile. "I should distrust you, perhaps hate you, even abhor you as a murderer, but as I sit here looking at you I somehow can't feel that way to-

ward you. Either I am a very poor judge of character, or else"—he paused, his eyelids drew together, a frown came—"I don't know," he finished lamely.

Dale laughed. "Afraid to trust your instincts, Mr. Ferryman? Well, that's natural. I'll make you a promise. Inside a few days—within a week at the most—the murderer of your wife will be brought to justice."

He rose, wondering if he had made too rash a promise. Ferryman rose also and followed his caller to the door. There, with still a trace of reluctance in his manner, he offered his hand. Dale shook it. He could see that, although he had not won the older man's confidence, he had made a good impression.

Half an hour later he was again in a telephone booth.

"Yes, he called only a short while ago," Miss Castle told him. "He is going to telephone again at nine."

"Splendid!" Dale glanced across his shoulder through the glass panel in the door. A lanky person in a shabby, gray suit was dawdling at the near-by counter. He lowered his voice. "I'll call at half past eight, if I may. That will give us half an hour for deliberation."

"Oh, do come," said Miss Castle eagerly. "I'll go mad unless I can talk to some one."

Dale strolled out into the sunshine again. For a while he amused himself by making divers short turns, doubling back on his course occasionally, dipping into subway entrances and out again, and after an hour of such maneuvers the lanky person in gray was no longer in sight. He laughed at his successful dodge, stopped at an exclusive shop window to inspect a display of neckwear, and in a moment he grew conscious of some one's furtive and deliberate scrutiny.

"Another," he mumbled. "Well, well!"

He turned away and leisurely saun-

tered down the street, pausing shortly before another shop window. This one had mirrors at three sides, and in one of them he saw a tall, loose-jointed, stylishly garbed person who shortened his steps as Dale stopped.

"Paul Ainsworth, alias Doctor Mof-fett," he mused. He fingered his jaw and smiled wryly at a recollection. Then he swung round suddenly.

"Oh, hello, Ainsworth!" he exclaimed. "This is luck. I was just longing for the sight of a familiar face. Shall we stroll along?"

"As you please," said Ainsworth with a shrug. His sneering, insolent manner concealed whatever disappointment he might have felt at being thus openly accosted by the person he was shadowing. "Who is the lucky little charmer?"

"The—what?"

"You were looking at a display of sealskin coats in that window. When a man shows an interest in such things, it generally means that he is contemplating a present for his lady love."

"Not necessarily. He may only be wondering how such a coat would look in a green light."

Ainsworth chuckled unpleasantly. "I see the jaw looks natural again."

"Thanks to massage and cold applications," said Dale good-naturedly, glancing at Ainsworth's empty left sleeve. "Shall we turn this way?"

They swung into a side street where the late afternoon traffic was not quite so thick.

"By the way, Ainsworth, where did you learn the art of shadowing?"

The other started uncomfortably. For the moment his supercilious manner was gone. His discomfiture did not last long, however.

"Oh, one learns all sorts of things in the course of a busy life."

"Yes, but it's rarely one learns them thoroughly. Let me give you a tip, Ainsworth. When you are shadowing a man and he leads you into a quiet

side street where there is little traffic and only an occasional taxicab, then look out. Your quarry is going to give you the merry ha-ha."

A lone taxicab came cruising along the curb, and Dale hailed it. With a wave to Ainsworth he jumped inside. The cab glided away, turned the corner, and was soon lost among thousands of its kind. Dale leaned back comfortably and lighted a cigar. He had had nothing to fear from Ainsworth's surveillance, but the little episode pleased him.

Soon, however, his face sobered. Ainsworth, with his dual rôle, was a greater problem than he had ever attacked. Somehow Miss Castle must be informed, but Dale did not relish the part of informer. If only there could be some sort of automatic adjustment, if only Fate would straighten out her own stupid tangles!

After half an hour's aimless roving he dismissed the taxi and dined at a hotel. He lingered over his after-dinner cigar and coffee, then took a walk. At precisely half past eight o'clock a servant ushered him into the Castle drawing-room.

Adele was there waiting for him. She was in a simple evening gown that yet gave an individual charm to her dark beauty. She looked up at him with a vague smile and gave him her hand.

"Are we alone?" Dale asked, glancing about the stately room.

"Yes, father is still at the office. I have left instructions that I am not at home to any one, but am to be called if I should be wanted on the telephone. Oh, by the way, did you see that horrid editorial in the *Sentinel*?"

"No. What's the yellow rag howling about now?"

"About the mysterious Mr. Graves. It says he must be exposed and punished in justice to the thousands of poor people he has swindled out of their pitiful savings." Her face flushed. "It says the failure of the police to appre-

hend him amounts to a public disgrace. It isn't fair! It's cruel! Poor father! He is working day and night so he can make restitution."

"There—there, it's going to be all right. How did Doctor Moffett sound over the phone?"

"He was very suave, but also very positive. He said certain circumstances had arisen which would oblige him to resort to extreme measures unless his terms are fulfilled within twenty-four hours."

"You haven't told your father that?"

"Oh, no. What would be the use of worrying him? I know that at present he couldn't possibly produce one hundred thousand dollars, or even a small part of it. Oh, what shall we do?"

Dale smiled reassuringly, although his heart was heavy. Last night the problem had seemed as good as solved. To-night it was as difficult as ever. He glanced at his watch.

"Where is the telephone?"

"In the hall, just outside the door."

"Can you trust the servants?"

"Oh, yes. They have been with us for years, and they are absolutely honest and reliable."

Dale went lightly across the floor. With a quick jerk he flung the door open. A portly manservant straightened up abruptly and shrank away with a startled and shamefaced air.

"Hello," said Dale, "what's up?"

The servant, thick, round-faced and portly, cringed within his conventional black garb.

"I—I only wished to see if Miss Castle was in the drawing-room, sir. She left orders she was to be called if wanted on the telephone, and I thought I would make sure where to find her."

"Oh, I see. Do you always peep through keyholes when you are looking for your mistress?"

"Keyholes, sir? Why, I—I——"

"That will do," said Dale, and closed the door. "You see, Miss Castle?"

"That was Wambley," the girl murmured perplexedly. "I never imagined he would do a thing like that. Do you suppose Doctor Moffett has bribed him?"

"Doubtless. If so——"

He paused, but his brows went up as if he had suddenly conceived an idea. He pursued it silently. If Wambley were in Doctor Moffett's pay, then it might be possible to shake a few truths out of his portly hide. "It shows we must be careful," he added.

She looked at her watch. "Doctor Moffett will telephone in a few minutes. What shall I tell him?"

"Tell him you are ready to deliver one half of the amount now and will give him the balance of the one hundred thousand later."

"What?" she exclaimed.

"I don't think the doctor expects payment in one lump sum," Dale explained. "One hundred thousand dollars is too bulky for easy handling. He will be satisfied with half for the present."

"But that's fifty thousand! Where would I get all that money?"

"Here," said Dale, and handed her the packet he had received at the bank.

She took it mechanically, looked at it, turned it over with a dazed air, and shook her head.

"But I—I can't accept——"

"No arguments," Dale interrupted. "We haven't much time. When Doctor Moffett telephones, he will probably set a time and place for the delivery of the money. Tell him you have fifty thousand now and expect to have the balance within a week."

"But I can't accept fifty thousand from you, not even as a loan."

"Nonsense! I am only making you the temporary custodian of two thousand forty-eight dollars, and I expect to get every penny of it back."

She stared at him for a moment, then looked down at the money in her hand.

Her spirits buoyed upward with a little laugh.

"Oh, I see! I hand Doctor Moffett or his agent this packet, and in return he will hand me the evidence without suspecting the padded packet. But——"

Her face fell.

"Yes, there is a *but*," said Dale. "Doctor Moffett will be suspicious. He knows we are not going to hand him so much money until we have tried everything else. On the other hand, we know that Doctor Moffett isn't going to kill the goose he expects to lay the golden egg."

She nodded thoughtfully. "Yes, I see that now. I don't know what I would do if you weren't here to reason things out for me. I've been too worried to think. This money——"

"This is our first card in the game we are playing with Doctor Moffett. To-morrow morning you will have the two larger bills marked in the presence of two reliable witnesses. A small cross or an initial will do. We are going to force Doctor Moffett to play one of his trumps."

She brightened again. "I am positively thrilled!" she declared.

Wambley's stately form appeared at the door. "There is a gentleman on the telephone," he announced.

The girl rose, a little tremor at the corners of her lips. Dale gave her an encouraging smile as she walked out. Wambley held the door opened and stood bowing until she had passed through, then started to follow.

"Oh, Wambley," said Dale evenly.

The servant turned and regarded him with respectful but uneasy attention.

"Please close the door and come here," Dale added. "I have something to say to you."

Passively the servant obeyed. His face, round and sleek as a swollen apple, showed no expression. He passed into the light where Dale stood leaning carelessly against an antique cabinet.

"Don't be bashful, Wambley. Closer, please."

Wambley advanced until the soft, clear light fell full on his pudgy face. Dale, toying with his watch chain, merely looked at him with his steady, faintly smiling gaze. Moments passed, and still he said nothing. Wambley was growing uneasy. He shifted his weight, swallowed and twisted his neck. His eyes fell beneath the level, humorous scrutiny of Dale's gray eyes. And still Dale only looked and looked and said nothing.

"Wambley," he asked at length, when the silent inspection had proceeded to the limit of the servant's endurance, "what is your price?"

"Sir?"

"I mean, what is the present market value of your honesty and loyalty?"

Wambley jerked his head back for a moment. "I don't understand, sir."

"Then I'll speak more plainly. How much do you receive for your services as a spy?"

"Spy?" The portly form shook a little. A look of indignation came into the chubby face. "This is too much, sir!"

"No indignation, please, Wambley. You can't do it convincingly. What I want to know is," and he paused and bent his head closer to the servant's, "how much is Paul Ainsworth paying you?"

Wambley jerked his head back with a gasp. His face turned pale. Dale laughed.

"Thanks, Wambley. You have told me all I want to know. On second thought I won't bid against Ainsworth. He is probably paying you all you are worth. You may go."

The servant stammered something, moistened his lips, and turned quickly away. At the same moment Miss Castle returned. A look of perplexity entered her anxious face as she glanced from Dale to Wambley.

"What did you say to him?" she inquired when the door closed behind the servant. "I'm sure he looked flustered enough."

"I just asked him a few questions. He is Doctor Moffett's spy, as we suspected, but he isn't clever enough to be really dangerous. What did you hear from the enemy?"

Her head drooped a little. Her lips quivered. "He told me he has a friend on the district attorney's staff—a deputy or something. To-morrow he intends to mail a transcript of the evidence to this friend, with instructions on the envelope that it is not to be opened until the following day. I am to give the money to his representative to-morrow night, at the Mummers' Frolic."

Dale's eyes widened. "So that's it! At the Mummers' Frolic? There will be hundreds of people at that giddy affair. How is Doctor Moffett's agent to identify himself?"

"By a password. He is to use the two words, 'yellow' and 'blue' in a single sentence."

"Appropriate!" Dale laughed after a moment's thought. "Yellow and blue. Mix them and you have green. Green is the intermediate between yellow and blue in the spectrum. So that's his little game! If you give him the money to-morrow night, he will go to the district attorney's office next day and reclaim the envelope."

"If you fail, the district attorney will have not only the transcript, but Doctor Moffett will give him the original documents as well. Was that what he threatened to do?"

"Yes, exactly."

"Well," said Dale musingly, "I think it is a bluff, at least as far as the transcript of the evidence is concerned, but we can't be sure. Anyway, it's a good bluff. Once the transcript reaches the district attorney's office, the thing is final and irrevocable, subject only to

your compliance with Doctor Moffett's demands. You agreed, of course?"

"Yes,"—she forced a little smile—"with tears in my eyes and a catch in my throat."

"I'll wager your acting was perfect. Did Doctor Moffett express a willingness to accept fifty thousand on account?"

"He said it would be satisfactory and that in return he will give me half the documents."

"And you will be at the Mummers' Frolic to-morrow night?"

"Yes. I got tickets three weeks ago."

"It's an odd thing," Dale's eyes twinkled. "So did I. Didn't mean to go, but now—will you reserve a dance for me?"

"Two," she promised.

"I'm a lucky beggar," said Dale airily. "By the way, is Mr. Ainsworth to be there?"

"No." She looked at him curiously, as if puzzled by a strange quality in his voice. "Paul has another engagement."

Dale's eyes were intent for a moment. "All settled then."

"Except what I'm going to wear" Her brow wrinkled delicately as she contemplated the eternal question. "Oh, I know! I shall go as a Spanish gypsy—as Carmen, maybe. And you?"

"I?" He smiled whimsically. "I shall go as The Picaroon."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MUMMERS' FROLIC.

THE Roman Emperor had made frequent trips to the punch bowl, and now he was showing the effects of excessive imbibing. He staggered noticeably and his face was a little flushed. There were vine leaves in his hair and he wore a flowing toga with a broad purple border such as Nero might have worn when he fiddled to the burning of Rome.

There was a pause in the general dancing while two professional entertainers performed a fandango to the accompaniment of guitar and castanets. The imperial tippler adjusted his mask, squared his shoulders and threw out his chest. He hiccuped and looked ir-resolute. Then, with the exaggerated erectness of one who can't trust his legs to behave, he started toward a row of chairs in the rear. For a few paces all went well, and then he collided with a swaggering caballero with trailing sword and flowing curls.

"Scush me," said the emperor.

"Why don't you look where you are going?" was the churlish response. A wrathful look out of the slits in the mask accompanied the reproach.

The emperor sat down, but his eyes followed the caballero's haughty progress. A little smile played about his lips.

"Thought Ainsworth wasn't coming," he mumbled under his breath. "Anyway, he might have left his bad temper at home."

Then, through eyes that looked a little groggy, he fell to watching the gay, colorful revel. A Paul Jones followed the fandango, and then a little band of Tyroleans in bright native costumes sang several songs. The next number was a jazzy fox trot which brought the majority of the gathering out on the floor.

The emperor's head slumped down toward his chest, but his eyes missed no detail of the scene. It was a scene full of dash and color. All the centuries, with their shifting garb, manners and follies, were there, from the shepherds of Arcadia and the languorous princesses of the Nile to the apaches of Paris and the black shirts of Italy.

A dusky Cleopatra flirted outrageously with a fierce-looking pirate. A furry Eskimo paid court to a veiled charmer from the harem. The inevitable Pierrette was there, coquetting

with a gorgeous and aggressive sheik. A mendicant monk hobnobbed with a Russian princess of the old régime. And in the background, apart from the general gayety, was a Carmen with roses in her hair.

The emperor gazed at her for a moment, and again a hint of a smile hovered about his lips. Then his eyes narrowed slightly behind the holes in his mask. A maid in tinsel armor—Joan of Arc, perhaps—had just approached Carmen in a casual sort of way. Soon they were chatting pleasantly. The emperor rose, walked unsteadily to the punch bowl, and refreshed himself again.

"Your imperial majesty has a magnificent thirst," remarked a flowery court attendant of the time of little Louis.

The emperor regarded him loftily. "It was Shake—Shakespeh," he pronounced unsteadily, "who dishcovered—hic—that a gen'l'man can drink—hic—himself sober. I am following hish ex—exshellent precept."

He rocked on his feet, took another drink, and moved away. As if to justify the Shakespearean precept, he carried himself more erect now. He did not return to the chair he had previously occupied, but chose one in closer proximity to Carmen and Joan of Arc. The hubbub was too great to permit him to hear what they were saying, and soon a plumed knight came forward and claimed Joan for the next dance.

The orchestra, concealed behind a wall of exotic foliage, struck up a waltz. The emperor stood up, steadied himself, approached Carmen and bowed.

"Will you do me the honor?" he murmured, soberly enough.

She regarded him doubtfully through her mask. The vine leaves in his hair were awry and his imperial toga did not hang quite straight.

"I am Nero," he announced while she hesitated. "I am not accustomed to be-

ing refused anything. I rule the earth. Everybody—blue devils or yellow Chinamen—must obey my desires.”

“Oh!” she exclaimed with a start. “Then you are——”

“I am Nero,” he interrupted.

She smiled vaguely, tremulously. “But I am neither a blue devil nor a yellow Chinaman.”

“You are Carmen,” he said, holding out his hand.

She rose reluctantly. “But you are intoxicated,” she objected.

“No matter. You may have observed that a man, even when he is too tipsy to walk straight, can usually dance with no difficulty whatever.”

It proved true. His waltzing, as she discovered after a few graceful glides, was perfect. But for her worry and anxiety she could have surrendered herself wholly to the charm of the dance.

“I don’t believe you are drunk,” she observed presently. “You are only pretending.”

“Your roses are falling out of your hair,” he observed. “Let us step out here where you can arrange them.”

They edged their way through the churning, laughing, mirth-drunken crowd and stepped out on a balcony. He handed her a rose he had caught as it fell from her hair.

“You were right,” he told her. “I wouldn’t get drunk to-night, of all nights. A semblance of inebriety has its advantages, however. When people see a man drunk, they are not likely to suspect him. What was Joan of Arc talking to you about?”

“She wants to get into the movies,” said the girl absently. “She wanted to know if I happened to have any influence with the directors.”

He smiled. She had spoken with a trace of caution, hostility and nervousness. In the meager light out there on the balcony he studied her face.

“Well, Miss Castle,” he murmured, “did you bring the money?”

Her slender shoulders shook a little. “How did you recognize me?” she asked evasively.

“Oh, that mask you are wearing doesn’t conceal much of your face. Besides, I had received confidential information that you were to appear as a Spanish gypsy.”

“Oh, Wambley told you,” she said contemptuously. “You have bribed him.”

“Suppose we don’t stress that point? What about the money?”

“What about the papers?”

“They are here, inside my imperial toga.”

“All of them?”

“Half of them. That was the agreement. You don’t think for a moment that I would cheat you?”

“Oh, no!” She tossed her head a little. “I know you are the soul of honor. May I see them?”

He laughed derisively. “Not so fast, my charming little gypsy. I have had some experience with feminine wiles. You haven’t answered my question. Did you bring the money?”

“It’s here.” With a vague gesture she indicated her silver-trimmed bodice.

“Fifty thousand?”

“That was the amount, wasn’t it?”

“H’m. That isn’t a direct answer. Did you, or did you not, bring fifty thousand dollars?”

“You are at liberty to count it,” said the girl evenly, “as soon as you have satisfied me that there will be no trickery.”

“Splendid!” exclaimed the emperor in a suddenly altered voice. “I think you will carry it off very well, Miss Castle.”

She started. “That voice!” She had removed her mask, and was gazing at him out of dilated eyes. “Oh, Mr. Dale!”

“Not so loud, Carmen. Some one may hear. Well, our little rehearsal came off in fine shape.”

She relaxed. All at once the caution and hostility faded out of her eyes. "But you said you were to appear as The Picaroon."

"And what did you expect The Picaroon to look like?"

"I hardly know. I certainly didn't expect to see him in a Roman toga with a purple border and with vine leaves in his hair."

"Well, you see, The Picaroon isn't committed to any particular style of apparel. He dresses according to the occasion and the mood he happens to be in. To-night——"

He paused, touched her arm, and glanced back over his shoulder. "Call me a drunken bully," he whispered, "and slap my face—slap it hard. Quick!"

She gasped as he wound his arm about her shoulder endearingly. There was a little sound at the door opening on the balcony. Instantly, as he drew her face to him as if to kiss her, she caught her cue.

"You drunken beast!" she cried indignantly, delivering a smart blow on his cheek. "How dare you? Go away—instantly!"

She pushed him from her. He lurched drunkenly, reached for her again, but another resounding slap sent him staggering toward the door, almost colliding with a figure that had just stepped out on the balcony. For a moment he paused, leering at her in the dusk, and then the door slammed and he was gone.

"The—the contemptible cad!" she cried, breathing hard from the exertion and the apparent humiliation. "I never was——"

She stopped. For the first time she appeared to notice the new arrival.

"Oh, you!" she exclaimed, recognizing Joan of Arc with her blond curls and her intriguing baby features. She had vaguely expected some one else. It seemed Dale had staged a useless

piece of mummery, but there was nothing to do but go through with it now.

"Did you see what that despicable ruffian tried to do?" she cried hotly.

"No, I just missed it," said Joan in her cooing voice. "But I can guess. Men are so beastly. Tried to steal a kiss, I suppose? The wretch!"

"He was drunk," said Adele, growing a little calmer. "Disgustingly drunk. Otherwise I might not have minded so much."

"I understand, dearie." By way of showing her sympathy Joan wound her arm around the other girl. "A kiss is rather nice sometimes, especially on a balcony in the moonlight, but who really wants to be kissed by a distillery?"

Adele laughed. "I'm all right now. It's foolish to get angry with a drunken man, but I couldn't help it."

"He seemed to be all right while you were dancing," Joan observed. "I was watching you two. But then men are funny. They are all right until they get you out in some moonlit nook, and then—look out! My Billy is that way. We had a dreadful spat the other day. Billy is awfully hot-headed, but I know how to manage him."

"How?" asked Adele, mildly amused by the naïve chatter. "Give me your recipe, and I may try it on the next emperor who comes along."

"Well, I guess men are all alike, whether they are emperors or just plain citizens. It's the little things that please them most. They like a girl to remember their favorite colors in neckties and socks and such things. It needn't amount to much, just so it's something that falls in with their taste. Well, after our quarrel the other day I dashed over to the haberdasher's and bought Billy the darlinest necktie you ever saw."

"And did he approve of your selection?" asked Adele absently. With so many graver problems on her mind this

conversation was becoming a little wearying.

"Did he approve?" Joan gushed. "Well, I guess he did! It was a lovely tie, a bright blue with little yellow dots in it."

Of a sudden Adele leaned weakly against the balcony railing.

"Blue—yellow," she mumbled. The words, by contrast with the inconsequential appearance of the speaker, had conveyed an added shock in addition to their intrinsic significance.

"Yes, blue and yellow—Billy's favorite colors," said Joan. She laughed lightly. And then, with a subtle change in her manner, she came a little closer to Adele. Her smile had altered; it was less open and naïve. She seemed more mature, even a little taller as she stood with the moon gleaming on her tinsel armor.

"Drop it over the railing," she whispered.

"Drop—what?" asked Adele dully.

"You know. The money, of course. You brought it, didn't you?" There was a vague hint of menace in her voice.

Adele nodded. Her mind, stunned by the sudden surprise, was not functioning as yet.

"Then let's hurry and get it over. It has all been arranged in advance. I am to drop a lighted match over the railing. That will be the signal." She produced a small silver case and extracted a match. "The moment the match falls you are to drop the money. Some one is waiting below to catch it."

Adele looked down, but all she could see was a black, yawning depth. Her brain swam a little. She glanced at the door, wondering whether Dale was on the other side, trying to overhear what was being said. She wished he could send her a thought wave advising her how to act. Again her eyes scanned the abyss outside the railing. Who was waiting down there? Whoever he was,

he had certainly guarded in a most ingenious way against being caught in the act of receiving blackmail money.

She shook herself as if to banish a stupor.

"The papers?" she asked feebly.

"They're here." Joan loosened her flimsy armor at one side and took out a bulky envelope. "Most of them are in Daniel Forrester's own handwriting. If you have any doubts, look them over."

It sounded candid and aboveboard. Adele removed the contents of the envelope, about a dozen papers of various sizes. It was too dark to see much, and the written characters swam in blurs before her eyes. From the inside came the orchestral din, adding to the confusion in her mind.

"Do you want a light?" Joan suggested. She struck a match, cupped her hands over it, and held it so the wavering sheen fell on the papers. "I want you to be satisfied with your purchase."

Adele started to run her eyes over the written lines. The phraseology was strange, full of technical terms and involved meanings and much of it she could not understand. But the broad outlines were clear. They showed plainly that her father was the mysterious Mr. Graves, the accomplice of the notorious Daniel Forrester. Little by little her doubts left her. Yes, these must be some of the damning documents to which Doctor Moffett had alluded in the course of that strange interview.

The papers shook in her trembling hand. Indignation, bitterness, a strange, rebellious excitement were growing apace within her. Her poor father! What an inferno of anguish he had passed through on account of the secret guilt which these papers revealed! She read on and on, turned page after page, while her companion struck match after match. At length she was through. She gazed down at the sheaf

of papers. Only papers, flimsy, inflammable stuff, yet how devastatingly vital they were!

"Satisfied?"

Adele looked up. In the dim light she studied the other girl's face. Joan had cast off her artlessness and simplicity, and the unmasked portions of her face looked a little hard and cruel, but there was no sign of duplicity. The eyes were gazing at her narrowly, intently, through the openings in the black mask.

"Another match, please," Adele murmured.

In the yellow flicker she studied the writing again, but her thoughts raced far beyond the margins. Only a few sheets of paper, yet they were charged with the power to wreck lives! Luridly the light of the match fell on characters penned in a crude, robust hand. Still another match. The yellow sheen seemed to blaze a path through a corner of her mind. If she could only——

Her heart beat a little faster. If she could only thrust a little corner of the sheaf of paper within the flame's destroying reach! In imagination she saw them wrinkle and become a black flake. Her father's secret reduced to ashes!

Her heart pounded chokingly. The little flame was beginning to dwindle, but there was still time. And then, at an instant's glance, she caught a look of intent watchfulness out of the holes in Joan's mask. A little smile, hard and subtly threatening, played about the rouged lips. The match went out. Adele shook herself. A mad hope had died with the match. Besides, she suddenly recalled, all the papers were not here, only half of them. The remaining ones were probably just as effective.

She felt the little packet of money inside her bodice. It was only a little over two thousand dollars, but a small fraction of the stipulated amount. To toss it over the railing seemed such a

simple thing to do. But surely the woman at her side would not be taken in by such a shallow deception. She would insist upon examining the money before the papers were surrendered. At a glance she would see through the ruse, and then—what would happen then?

"Well, Miss Castle," said Joan impatiently. "Aren't you satisfied yet?"

Adele tried to play for time. There was nothing else to do.

"Are you sure these papers are genuine?"

"Genuine? Of course. They're in Forrester's own handwriting."

Adele felt an ache of indecision. Where was Dale? If he would only transmit a message of some kind! Her wits appeared to have deserted her in the first great crisis of her sheltered and soft-cushioned existence. She must gain a little more time.

"Just another match, please."

"It will be the last," said Joan. "There is only one more left, and I must save that for the signal."

Again Adele bent her eyes to the papers. Daniel Forrester's kinky signature sprawled beneath her burning gaze. A fugitive doubt assailed her again while she tried to make the most of the speeding moments. Never before had she seen Forrester's handwriting. For all she knew, this might be a forgery. Her stampeding brain steadied to the thought. Just before the match went out she bent another look of critical scrutiny on the signature.

"Just as I thought," she declared, "this is only a copy—a forgery."

Her companion's short laugh cut clear and hard through the crashing syncopation of the orchestra.

"You poor little fool! You are only making a stupid bluff. You never saw Daniel Forrester's signature. Now I know you didn't bring the money. You have only been playing for time. Now I'm——"

She stopped short. From the dark depth below came a little sizzling sound. A little streak of fire immediately shot into the air and broke into a burst of sparks.

Joan snatched the papers away from Adele.

"The deal is off," she declared, a faint hiss in her voice. "That was a warning. There is something wrong below. Go back to your drunken emperor!"

CHAPTER XV.

ON THE TRAIL OF THE CABALLERO.

AFTER he had left Adele Castle and the newcomer on the balcony, Dale gathered up his trailing purple-bordered robe and returned to the ballroom. The gayety was at its noisiest, most tumultuous height. Faces were flushed and masks were awry or removed altogether. A little unsteadily Dale edged his way through the swirling, carousing throng. His eyes seemed dull and heavy and he offered his apologies in a thick lisp when occasionally he bumped into a merry-maker.

At length he found an unoccupied chair and sat down. His head slumped to his chest and he seemed half asleep, but through the corner of an eye he took in every detail of the boisterous scene. Everywhere he looked for the swaggering caballero he had encountered earlier in the evening, but that haughty cavalier was nowhere in sight.

His eyes grew a little heavier. Now and then he roused himself and looked groggily across the floor, in the direction of the balcony. He wondered what Adele Castle and the person who had joined her out there were talking about.

A knowing little smile twitched his lips. He could make a fairly close surmise. The armored little maiden had not deceived him with her naïve looks and artless manners. She had approached Adele with all outward ap-

pearance of casualness, but Dale's keen eyes had seen through all that.

Joan had carried casualness to an extreme that roused his suspicions. He had read design and premeditation in her most innocent glances. Doctor Moffett was certainly exercising a queer judgment in his choice of agents. Yet his choice in this particular instance had much to commend it. Joan's airy patter and unsophisticated manner would have deceived the average observer.

Yet the arrangement puzzled Dale. What could Doctor Moffett's emissary accomplish out there on the balcony, where an interruption might occur any moment and where a trap might easily have been set for her? Surely she did not mean to receive the blackmail money in such an unprotected place. Doctor Moffett was too shrewd and farsighted a scoundrel not to have anticipated such risks. He must have chosen this particular place for the delivery of the money because he considered it safe.

Dale pondered, and of a sudden his brows went up and a faint gleam of comprehension kindled in his eyes. He had just asked himself how he would have made his arrangements if he had been in Doctor Moffett's place and if he had chosen this particular balcony as the scene of the transaction. The answer came instantly. The money was to be dropped over the railing, of course, to another of Doctor Moffett's agents who was waiting down below to receive it and make a sudden flight the moment it was in his hands.

Dale smiled thinly. No other arrangement was conceivable, so his surmise must be correct. On the whole the scheme was rather ingenious. It offered the maximum of success with the minimum of risk. The ball itself, with its raucous hilarity, gave the best sort of protection. Attention, if any, would be focused on Joan of Arc, not on the person waiting down below. A trans-

action in blackmail was always more or less dangerous, but this scheme reduced the danger to the lowest possible minimum.

As he viewed the arrangement from all angles, Dale found himself conceiving a new respect for Doctor Moffett. Then he fell to wondering how far Miss Castle would be able to lead the emissary on before the latter should discover that the roll of blackmail money was padded. Nearly ten minutes must have elapsed since he left the balcony, and he was thoroughly convinced that he must act quickly and to the best possible advantage.

He formed a mental picture of the terrain. The ballroom was on the very top of the Hotel Vandermoore, one of the largest and most sumptuous hostleries in the city, although not very fastidious with regard to its clientele. The balcony, twenty-six stories above the ground, looked out upon a narrow court with tall buildings on all sides. At this hour most of the windows in those buildings would be dark. A watcher waiting down below for a packet of money to be dropped from the top would be in no great danger of detection.

He got up from the chair, swayed a little, stroked his brow as if suffering from a slight headache, and looked out over the room. Still there was no caballero in sight. The room was becoming insufferably hot and stuffy. Unsteadily he made his way through the eddying crowd. In the hall outside he removed his mask while he wiped the moisture from his forehead, then replaced it again.

Now he moved to the window at the farther end and drew the fresh night air into his lungs. Leaning out only slightly, so that his head barely showed beyond the window frame, he looked down into the black cavern below, then to the side. On a balcony about twenty feet away he descried two dim figures.

A scarcely audible word was brought to him by a slight puff of wind:

"Satisfied?"

It was Joan of Arc speaking, of course. From the one little word he could make a fairly accurate guess as to the trend of the conversation on the balcony. He tried to hear more, but the rest was indistinguishable. Again he scanned the black depth below, then left the window and, disdaining the elevators, sought the stairs. It would not matter greatly if he should meet any one. On this particular night almost any sort of conduct would pass unquestioned at the Vandermoore. He descended sixteen flights, then stepped to a hall window which was directly beneath the window above.

For an instant he looked back. The long hall, flanked by doors on either side, was deserted. In the ceiling glowed a row of frosted lights. Cautiously he leaned over the sill and looked down. He strained eyes and ears. From this lower level he could distinguish the flagged surface of the court. He saw a row of milk cans, a stack of packing cases, a cat slinking across the murky space, but there was neither sound nor movement.

Disappointed, and wondering if he had reasoned falsely, he let his eyes slant upward along the wall. High up was a series of projections, like bird's nests clinging to a sheer cliff. One of them, he knew, was the balcony on which Miss Castle and Joan of Arc were standing, but at this distance he could not determine the exact one.

Again he looked down, straining ears and eyes, still loath to think that he had made a mistake. Again, as his pupils responded to the lower darkness, the objects down there began to take shape. Back and forth his eyes roved, searching every foot of space and presently they fastened on a point near the stack of packing cases. A blur, scarcely distinguishable from its back-

ground, riveted his attention. It was a formless thing at first, only a slight shade blacker than the darkness which framed it.

"Protective coloring!" he mused.

His eyes began to ache from the intense strain. Little by little the blurry thing began to differentiate itself from its surroundings. A shape stood out vaguely from the shadowy masses. He gave a surprised start. Then, leaning a little lower over the sill, he formed a tube with his hands and whistled softly. Something stirred in response. A pair of eyes seemed to be peering upward.

"A dog!" Dale thought. "My hat off to you, Doctor Moffett. You've trained him for this job, of course—rehearsed him, very likely. Great idea!"

Dale grew thoughtful. He could admire the cleverness of an adversary, even a despicable one like Doctor Moffett. He saw the plan clearly now. When the packet dropped from the balcony, the dog would clutch it in his jaws and, by a prearranged route, slink off to a waiting car and a waiting master somewhere in the neighborhood. There were hundreds of cars parked in the vicinity of the Vandermoore tonight. Nobody would suspect a dog of mischief. If seen in the act, he would merely excite admiration for his cleverness.

Suddenly Dale jerked up his head. A slight scraping sound, like that of a window being cautiously raised, had reached his ears. He glanced upward along the wall, most of it dark, but with here and there an isolated light. From a dark window a little to the side and a few floors higher up, a head protruded. A dim light fell on it from the window just above, and Dale could see it was a man's head. The man was looking upward, toward the row of balconies at the top, perhaps at the very balcony where Miss Castle and Joan of Arc were.

Dale nodded. In addition to the dog, there would be a watcher, of course, waiting to see if there should be a hitch in the proceedings. As well as he could in the dim light, Dale studied the shape of the head and the long blond wig which framed it. Evidently the watcher was one of the merry-makers. And Dale thought he had seen that blond head before.

The head turned. For an instant Dale caught a vague glimpse of a face, and then the head disappeared within the window.

"The caballero—Paul Ainsworth!" he mumbled. He was still gazing rigidly at the window from which the wigged head had projected. One, two, three. It was three floors above his own level. That would be the thirteenth floor, just midway between the ground and the roof. The window was the fifth from the central hall in a horizontal direction.

With the location clearly fixed in his mind, he went to the stairs, ran up three flights, and turned into the transverse corridor at the left. He counted the doors as he passed them. At the fifth from the turn he stopped, and the metal figures on the upper panel told him it was No. 1325.

He waited a moment. There was no sign of life in the hall. The orchestral din on the top floor was scarcely audible here. After a moment's hesitation he turned the knob gently. The door must have been left unlocked in preparation for a quick retreat if necessary, for it swung easily inward. He held it open a bit and listened, but no sounds came from the interior. He touched his hair, his mask, his purple-trimmed robe, and without a sound stepped inside.

Silently he moved forward, approaching the window, only a gray blur in the darkness encompassed by the four walls. Only a few steps he moved, across a rug that deadened the sound of his footsteps, then stopped. In the

gloom he could hear some one breathing, and he traced the sound to a point near the window. He waited a little, not quite certain how to proceed, and presently his eyes turned in another direction. Again he heard a subdued intake of breath. There were two watchers in the room.

Holding his own breath he moved back a few steps. There was a sound of movement in the front of the room. A man's head and shoulders were silhouetted against the window. For a moment the man leaned out and glanced upward.

"Annie is taking her time," a voice mumbled. Dale recognized the voice in an instant. The speaker was Paul Ainsworth. The Annie referred to could be none other than Joan of Arc.

"Annie is wise," another voice remarked. It was low and indistinct, and it sounded vaguely familiar to Dale, yet he could not identify it. "She knows we're playing this game to the tune of one hundred thousand berries. It pays to go slow and move carefully. Anyhow, there's no hurry. This party will last till daylight."

Ainsworth mumbled something under his breath. Dale was searching his memory for a clew to the other speaker's identity. He was certain he had heard the voice somewhere before.

"One hundred thousand," the same voice went on. "It's a nice little grubstake. Too bad it's got to be split five ways."

"Five ways," Dale thought. That meant there were five in the blackmailing band. He tried to check them off by name: Doctor Moffett, alias Paul Ainsworth, Annie, Axelson. Miss Conway was not to be counted, for she was dead. Who were the other two? The answer eluded him, but by way of compensation the other speaker's name suddenly flashed through his mind. Axelson, of course!

Again a shadow appeared at the win-

dow. Ainsworth was looking up at the balcony.

"Wish she would hurry," he mumbled peevishly, moving away from the window again. "Can't imagine what's delaying her."

"Miss Castle probably wants to look the papers over," Axelson suggested. "A lot of good it will do her! If I say it myself, I did a good job copying those papers. Even if she knows Forrester's handwriting—and I'll bet she doesn't—she won't be able to tell them from the originals."

Dale started a little. So the papers were merely copies! Well, he had suspected something of the sort. The originals, of course, were to be retained by Doctor Moffett and used by him for the purpose of further extortion.

"Oh, don't crow," said Ainsworth with his usual surliness. "I'll admit you are clever at that sort of thing, but don't forget that a lot of clever forgers are wasting their talents behind prison bars."

"So are a lot of clever blackmailers," Axelson retorted.

A pause fell. Dale was getting a deeper and more comprehensive insight into Ainsworth's despicable character. There seemed to be no limits to the man's villainy. Even while his heart ached for Miss Castle such an exhibition of treachery and infamy filled him with loathing.

"Are you sure Miss Castle came here alone?" Ainsworth asked in an undertone.

"Positive. Not worrying?"

"I'm just wondering if she is quite as simple as she looks. I think she would be capable of playing a trick on us."

"What can she do? We've taken precautions against every sort of surprise she can possibly spring on us, haven't we? I don't see where there's any room for trickery. Annie won't even touch the money. Miss Castle

will just drop it over the railing, and Cæsar will do the rest."

"Cæsar," Dale thought. That was the dog, of course.

Another pause came, then Ainsworth asked: "Did you see the man in the white toga with the purple border?"

"Oh, you mean the cockeyed one?"

"I'm not sure he was as cockeyed as he looked. He danced with Miss Castle, and afterward he took her out on the balcony. I don't like the way he acted."

"She had to dance with somebody, didn't she? And it's the most natural thing in the world to step out for a bit of fresh air after a dance."

Dale smiled. It was a lucky thing he had selected a mask that concealed more of his features than the ordinary mask did. His muscles were beginning to feel the strain of remaining motionless for so long. He moved a foot cautiously.

"It's all right," Axelson was saying. "You're just nervous to-night. Everything is going all right. We'll trim Castle good and hard, and then we go after Ferryman, eh? Ferryman is rich. Not so rich as Castle, but he's got a lot of coin salted away. And he owes me something for the way he gave me the air. I'd like to——"

He stopped and caught his breath sharply. His foot, as he moved it to ease his cramped position, had struck against something.

"Say, did you hear that?" Axelson exclaimed in a hoarse whisper.

"Sh!" Ainsworth whispered back.

Dale sensed two pairs of ears and eyes straining in his direction. He moved back and ran his hand along the wall until he found the light switch. A little click sounded, but no lights came on. The bulbs had either been removed or partly unscrewed to forestall the very thing he had attempted to do.

"It's a plant!" Axelson cried hoarsely. "We've got to stop it! Quick—the signal!"

A match flared up. Then came a sizzling sound like that of a frying pan over a fire. A small streak of flame shot up over the window sill. Then two pairs of feet scurried quickly across the floor. The door slammed.

With a soft chuckle Dale stepped forward and fumbled for the light fixture. As he had suspected, the bulb had been partly unscrewed to break the connection. He gave it a few twists, and a bright light came on. He saw a spacious room, an open traveling bag on the floor, a few toilet articles on the dressing table.

He acted in great haste now, as if each second were precious. He took two newspapers, saturated them with ink from a bottle on the writing desk, formed them into a small, compact bundle, tied a string around it, and held it at arm's length. A small, steady trickle of ink fell from the package.

Smiling, he stepped to the window. He looked down for a moment, then let the ink-dripping package drop to the ground.

"Cæsar will do the rest," he chuckled softly as he ran quickly from the room.

CHAPTER XVI.

A TRAIL OF INK.

AS if to cheer the pale, lovely girl seated on the frail-limbed Chippendale chair, a flood of glorious sunshine poured through the windows of the Castle drawing-room.

"How dreadful!" she sighed.

Dale, looking his brightest and freshest, picked up the afternoon paper she had dropped to the floor. A prominent black caption stood out from the general run of news on the front page:

ARREST OF THE MYSTERIOUS MR. GRAVES PROMISED WITHIN TWENTY-FOUR HOURS.

Dale ran his calm, gray eyes down the appended column.

"Rot!" he exclaimed.

"But it says the police have definite information which will positively lead to an arrest before to-morrow night."

"Lies!" Dale crumpled the paper and flung it from him. "It is only yellow journalism at its worst. Nothing but insinuation, innuendo and drivel. Not one positive statement in the whole article. I admit Doctor Moffett is clever, though. He has fed a few harmless hints to the authorities, enough for this yellow rag to base a scarehead on. His object is to frighten your father and you, and to convince you that he is ready to go the whole way unless you submit."

"But suppose he should——"

"Look here, Miss Castle, Doctor Moffett is flourishing a big gun, but he has only one shot. He isn't going to waste that shot."

She considered, then brightened a little. "I was hoping to hear from you yesterday," she murmured.

"Busy," said Dale laconically.

She smiled faintly. "I thought perhaps you were resting after the big night."

"Oh, the Mummers' Frolic. Rather a bore, wasn't it?"

She searched his face. "Not for me. Was it for you?"

"That reminds me. This is my first opportunity to ask you what happened out there on the balcony after I left. Joan of Arc proved to be Doctor Moffett's messenger, I suppose?"

"Oh, you knew that? I didn't suspect anything until she spoke a sentence with the words 'blue' and 'yellow' in it. She almost knocked me over with that sentence."

"No wonder. What happened?"

She looked at him as if suspecting that he knew a great deal more than he pretended, but she plunged into her story, finishing at the point where a warning signal had been flashed to her companion on the balcony. "I'm afraid

I didn't carry it off very well," she concluded.

"You did splendidly," Dale assured her. "Did you know the papers were forgeries, or was it only a bluff?"

"Only a bluff."

"Well, it was a good one, and it happened to be true."

She looked a little startled. "Then the papers *were* forgeries?"

"They were copies," said Dale. "Doctor Moffett meant to keep the originals for future use."

The dark look in her face showed that she understood.

"What a blackguard he is!" she exclaimed.

"Oh, all of that," said Dale in his softest tones.

She reflected for a moment. "But the signal? What was the meaning of that?"

Briefly Dale explained his own part in the events leading up to the signal, but he omitted the fact that Ainsworth was one of the two men he had found in the room on the thirteenth floor of the Vandermoore. She listened intently, her eyes gradually widening with amazement.

"A dog was to receive the money!" she exclaimed. "What an idea!"

"A rather clever one. After giving the signal, the two men fled from the room very hurriedly. I didn't care so much about them, but what I was curious to know was whether Cæsar would have carried the packet of money if one had been dropped. I supposed some one was waiting for him in a car near by, but that night every block in the neighborhood of the Vandermoore was packed with cars, so it would have been hard to find the right one. Then I hit upon the idea of having Cæsar lead me to it."

She wrinkled her forehead perplexedly.

"It was perfectly simple. I merely dropped a package from the window.

It was only a couple of newspapers done into a neat bundle, but Cæsar couldn't be expected to know that. He did his duty like a thoroughbred. Oh, I forgot to tell you. First I saturated the newspapers with ink."

"Oh!" she exclaimed after a moment's bewilderment. She laughed a little. "And then you ran down and picked up Cæsar's trail."

Dale nodded. "It was lucky I had a trail to follow. The car was parked several blocks away, and I would never have found it without Cæsar's assistance. The trail grew fainter and fainter. The papers absorbed some of the ink, of course. But I found the car. It was just about to start, and I barely had time to jump into a taxi and follow it." Dale laughed amusedly. "Wonder what the person in the car thought when Cæsar brought him that package."

She gave him a warm glance of approval. "That was clever. Where did you follow the car?"

Dale looked suddenly diffident. "To Doctor Moffett's new headquarters," he replied vaguely. "He had to leave Bank Street, you know, after the excitement the other night."

His tone seemed to puzzle her. "Did you see who was in the car?"

"No, it was too dark, and it drove away too quickly." He paused for a moment. "Any other developments since I saw you last?"

"Mr. Ferryman called yesterday. He appears to be a very kind gentleman. He said he understood his house had been the scene of certain activities that had brought unpleasantness to father and me. Feeling as if he were somehow responsible, he wanted to know if there was anything he could do."

"Generous of him," said Dale. "He can't help us, but the offer shows he has a kind heart. You and I will handle Doctor Moffett, and we'll put a crimp in his scheme before long."

His confident tone made her smile. "You make me forget all my troubles," she told him.

"Then," his whimsical gaze lingered on the sun glints in her raven hair, "I am justifying my existence."

"The Picaroon's existence!" she murmured.

He smiled soberly. "It needs a lot of justification. Ask Summers. He knows." He looked at her a little wistfully. "You are a bit pale. Why not go out in the sunshine for a while?"

"What about the moonlight? Mr. Ainsworth has asked me to go driving this evening."

"Oh!" It was as if a shadow had suddenly fallen between them. "I don't think Ainsworth likes me."

"He will when he knows you. And you will like him."

Dale groaned inwardly. How splendid she was with her unfaltering faith in the man she loved—how splendid and how blind!

"Poor Paul!" she murmured. "He has had reverses lately—lost a lot of his money. Now he has to economize, and I believe he is ashamed of it, though he has no reason to be. It would make no difference to me if he was down to his last dollar."

"No, it wouldn't—not with a girl like you."

"I know he will get up again," she declared. "He isn't the kind that stays down for long."

"I believe you are right there." Dale could not keep a trace of bitterness out of his voice. At that moment, with Adele Castle seated before him, her heart full of loyalty and blind love, he could have strangled Ainsworth without a qualm.

She looked at him intently, her mouth and throat quivering, her dark eyes full of gentle regrets. She rose and came toward him.

"You are a wonderful friend," she murmured.

It was one of the most uncomfortable moments in Dale's life. She was smiling at him through a veil of mist, reading his face—and reading it wrongly.

"I don't want any misunderstanding to come between us," she said gently. "I hope we shall remain the best of friends."

"Yes, always," said Dale thickly. Was there ever such a situation? Here he was, racking his brain to save her from a heartbreaking disaster. And she, misunderstanding, was endeavoring to save him from another sort of tragedy.

"Then we understand each other?" She gave him her hand with a gesture full of friendliness and sympathy.

"Oh, perfectly——"

Wambley's portly figure appeared at the door. "There is a gentleman on the telephone, Miss Castle," he announced.

Dale and the girl exchanged glances. He nodded slightly. She went out, and when she returned a few minutes later all the warm coloring had fled from her face.

"It was Doctor Moffett," she told him.

"I expected that. I suppose his voice was full of sweetness and light?"

"He asked me if I had seen the article in the *Sentinel*. I told him I had, and he said it was only a beginning. He added that the mysterious Mr. Graves will positively be in jail to-morrow night unless he receives a check for one hundred thousand dollars to-night."

"A check?" Dale exclaimed in amazement.

"Yes, he said my own personal check will do. Then he laughed and added that the Castle name is always good."

Dale regarded her in stupefaction. "A check? He knows you haven't as much money as that in the bank. Anyway, payment could be stopped."

"I overdrew my balance last month," she confessed.

Dale frowned perplexedly. "That's too deep for me. Didn't think Doctor

Moffett was such a trusting soul. What else did he say?"

"He said I am to bring the check to him in person and——"

"Oh!" Dale interrupted, and suddenly his face turned grave. "Not so trustful after all. He gave you elaborate instructions, I suppose?"

"I am to take the car out and drive along Broadway, between Herald Square and Fiftieth Street, about eleven to-night."

"The after-theater rush hour," Dale pointed out. "Somewhere along the route, I take it, somebody will drop a note into the driver's seat telling you how to proceed. He warned you, of course, that you must be alone in the car, that you mustn't have any one follow you, and that you mustn't discuss the arrangement with any one."

"Yes—but how did you know?"

"That's what he would naturally tell you. What a devilish idea!"

"I don't understand."

Dale regarded her with a dark, frowning gaze. "Remember what he told you—that the Castle name is always good?"

"Oh!" She started suddenly. "He thinks father will make the check good. Yes, perhaps he would if he could."

"Doctor Moffett thinks he can."

"But a check exacted by threats and intimidation wouldn't have any legal validity."

"No, but——"

He hesitated. His expression was a curious blend of grimness and gentleness. "You might as well understand the fiendish plan. Doctor Moffett specified that you are to deliver the check in person. He means to keep you as a hostage until it has been paid. From now on he intends to exert double pressure on your father. He already has the Forrester documents, now he will have you besides. That gives him a double-barreled weapon. If you are in his power, he feels that your father

will make the check good somehow—even if he has to rob a safe."

"Yes, and he would, too."

Dale suddenly brightened a little. "Buck up! Don't you see the silver lining? Doctor Moffett is weakening. He is on the run."

"Weakening?"

"He is no longer relying on blackmail alone. His original scheme hasn't proven as successful as he expected, and so he has changed his method. That's a sign of weakness. It's also our cue to strike."

"When?" Again her drooping spirits caught the contagion of his mood.

"To-night, if you are in the mood for a bit of adventure."

"You don't mean——"

"Yes, I would advise you to do exactly as Doctor Moffett says. Are you willing?"

Her hesitation was brief. A gleam of audacity entered her eyes. "Oh, yes, since you advise it!"

"That's the spirit! You will be driving along Broadway, between Herald Square and Fiftieth Street, about eleven o'clock to-night. In your bag or your pocket you will carry a certified check for one hundred thousand dollars. By the way, what kind of car do you drive?"

"A Waynefleet eight sedan."

He looked a little envious. "That's a regular speed demon, isn't it?"

"Father has been thinking of selling it."

"Before he does, I would like to try it some time. I never sat at the wheel of a Waynefleet eight. I wonder"—he gazed at her smilingly—"if you'd mind if I took a spin in it before dinner?"

"Why, no." Her eyes were full of mystification. "Of course I wouldn't mind. I'll give you an order on the garage." She stepped to the writing desk, wrote something, then handed him a sheet of paper.

"Thanks," said Dale, putting the paper in his pocket. "Now remember this. Whatever happens to-night, I shan't be far away. I'll be closer than you imagine. You will be watched, of course, by one of Doctor Moffett's hirelings who will keep his eyes open for any sign of trickery. You will drive carefully and avoid bumps."

"Avoid—what?"

"Bumps. You don't want to be all shaken up before you arrive. That's important."

She drew a long breath of stupefaction. "Very well. I'll avoid—bumps. Anything else?"

"That's all. I'll now go for my spin in the Waynefleet eight. That will give me an appetite for dinner. Believe I shall dine at Flaggler's. The chef there knows how to——"

He paused. For a moment he stood and inspected the ceiling.

"The chef there knows how to appease a long-suffering palate," he went on, and as he spoke he sprang lightly to the door, flung it open, and in a moment had the squirming and protesting Wambley by the neck.

"Quiet, Wambley," he advised. "Miss Castle, we must put him somewhere for the next few hours. I don't want him to get in touch with anybody."

Adele, quickly recovering from her surprise, thought for a moment. "There's a room in the attic——"

"Lead us to it, please. Better step along quietly, Wambley, or a hard-working spy will come to grief."

Wambley decided to step along quietly. They left him in the attic room, hands and feet securely bound and a gag covering the lower portion of his face. Dale locked the door with care.

Fifteen minutes later he was gliding gently up Broadway in the Waynefleet sedan. He crossed the Harlem River and pursued a twisting course for a while. At length he stopped in front

of a large service station and interviewed the grimy foreman.

"How many men can you put to work on this car?" he asked.

"I have seven mechanics, but four of them knock off in half an hour. What seems to be the trouble?"

"Keep your mechanics," said Dale. "I'll pay well. This is a rush job. I want a new top on this car."

The man in the greasy overalls viewed the black, unwrinkled top with a puzzled look. Then he opened the door and inspected the under side of the covering. He fixed a mystified eye on Dale.

"What's wrong with the old one?"

"Nothing, except that I want a new top." He leaned toward the man and cocked an eye confidentially. "I want a two-layer top," he elucidated in an undertone, "with plenty of room between the two layers. Better put in some extra braces, too. It has to be strong enough to support a weight of one hundred and seventy pounds."

The man's grease-spattered brows went up. He eyed Dale's prepossessingly garbed figure suspiciously, with an expression of limited understanding, then shrugged his shoulders.

"And you don't want the bulge to show, I guess," he wisely surmised. "All right, gov'nor, I can fix you up, but you know, it's gonna cost you something."

"I expect to pay well for a good job." Dale looked the man straight in the eyes. "And I am willing to add a premium for silence. Have it ready not later than ten o'clock."

He walked away and hailed a taxi on the street corner. The man watched him with a queer grin.

"Don't know whether that bird wants to lug a corpse or a couple hundred quarts of hooch. Nothin' in my life, anyhow. Looks like a swell. Guess he won't argue 'bout the price." He turned and shouted toward the interior of the garage: "Hey, you fellows!"

To be continued in next week's issue of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE.



POLICE THROW SEIZED WEAPONS OVERBOARD

EVERY year, the police of New York get rid of the deadly weapons taken from criminals by putting them on a police patrol boat and taking them out to sea, where they are thrown overboard. A few weeks ago, this ceremony was duly performed, five thousand revolvers and automatics and three hundred rifles being taken down the bay and jettisoned about three and a half miles southeast of Ambrose Lightship. This collection included, besides revolvers and shotguns, a number of blackjacks, stilettos, knives, daggers, and swords. A few days later, another boatload of two thousand more pistols and twenty rifles went into the ocean. The destruction of these deadly implements was under the supervision of the property clerk of the police department.



WHERE WAS LADY LUCK?

By Philip Hubbard

Author of "Dead Man's Luck," etc.

IT is an axiom of the late, unlamented Mr. Euclid that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points. Euclid did not, in fact, put his axiom quite so simply—he was a verbose scientist—and, oddly, he has no axiom dealing with crooked lines. Possibly he might have defined them as the lines drawn by crooks. In the case of "Lefty" Henson this would not have applied. Mr. Henson drew the line at nothing, not even murder.

For a brief but exciting period Mr. Henson was known to the police, the press, and the public as the "motor-cop bandit." In the guise of a guardian of the public highways he victimized all and sundry who used the roads by night. He robbed, he murdered and—but why go into details—there are crimes worse than murder. Many of Mr. Henson's victims would rather have faced death than endure what he forced them to endure.

Lovers' Lane was Lefty's hunting

ground. A profitable hunting. He cleaned up a small fortune in cash and jewels. He might have gone on indefinitely with this cowardly blackmail had he been content with such tactics. He was not content. He allowed pleasure to interfere with business and, because of this, they trapped him.

In spite of the long list of villainies proven against him, he escaped the death sentence. He, instead, retired to the pen for life instead of a deserved death. Two years later, the sob sisters began a campaign for his parole. The parole board listened to the sob stories and, fortunately, paid no heed to them. Better, said the parole board, that Lefty had been hanged, but as things were they were satisfied to keep Mr. Henson under control for the remainder of his life.

This decision arrived at and communicated to Lefty, the latter promptly took matters into his own hands. He did not propose to stay in the pen for life. Better death in an effort to es-

cape—preferably death for somebody other than Lefty. So he condemned and executed a prison guard who stood between him and freedom. He did this in a fashion in keeping with his prepen record. He took advantage of the trust reposed in him.

At the time he was, because of his good behavior since his conviction, a trusty working with a road gang. One evening, when the gang fell in for the march back to camp, Lefty tripped and fell at the feet of the guard. He cried out as if in pain. The guard, all unsuspecting, stooped to help him. Lefty grabbed the man's gun and shot him dead. Another trusty, springing to the guard's assistance, shared the same fate on a second shot. The remainder of the section took to their heels to warn the other guards. Lefty made off in the opposite direction and struck across country. Night fell and covered his retreat.

He avoided the roads until he had put some miles between himself and the prison camp. Then he struck across the valley to the town at its head. He skirted the town and struck a byway well known to him. There is a Lovers' Lane near every town. There was one here. Presently he found what he sought—a closed car parked in the shadows. Inside it were a man and a girl.

Two minutes later, a badly scared couple who had been cleaned of all they possessed except the clothes they stood in—and the man was saved his own only by the fact that the sound of another car approaching had scared Lefty off before a change could be made—started to walk to town in the wake of their own car whose tail light receded into the distance.

The ranch house stood on a slope of rising ground. It was dusk. An air of drowsiness and peace lay over the ranch.

Inside the house was hell let loose.

The girl—she could not have been more than sixteen—struggled in the grip of the brute who was mauling her. She could feel his hot breath on her face as she fought and tore at the calloused hands holding her. Outside, the hens clucked noisily. Feed time! She had to feed the chickens. That was the last thing her father had reminded her to do before he and her brother had ridden off to the desert town, twenty miles away.

She had had to stay home because she had twisted her ankle jumping down from the loft ladder. Her father had told her to keep quiet and rest the injured limb. Quiet! And here she was, fighting for life and more than life against the onslaught of this beast. But for that twisted ankle, she would never have been trapped; this slow, heavy-shouldered hobo would never have caught her. She could have run from him and dodged him until he tired of the futile game.

He had trapped her all unaware. First, that whining tale of hunger as he stood in the twilight, half unseen. Then, growing bolder as he divined that she was alone on the ranch, the change of tone and a demand for admission. She had struggled to bar the door but he had been too strong for her. She had wasted no breath or time on futile screaming. There was none to hear, unless by some evil chance this brute had a side kick lurking near. In that case her plight would be doubly desperate. Mutely, she had fought, torn, scratched—mutely and uselessly.

Her strength was almost spent now. She made a last call on her ebbing endurance, clutching at the thick neck. She slipped and lost her grip, grabbed again and slipped. She clutched wildly at anything, clutched and tore. Something tore away. In her strenuous frenzy her hand closed on the object and held to it. She was spent.

She could fight no more. Spent, done. Then, unbelievably; the thud of galloping hoofs.

She mustered the last remnants of strength and screamed. An answering shout from the corral, followed by the tramp of spurred boots over the hard-baked adobe. Mouthing curses, her assailant struck brutally at her and loosed his hold. She slid to the floor in a faint as her attacker dived for the window. Her right hand was still tightly clenched on what lay within it. Then her grasp relaxed and there rolled to the floor a button—a peculiar, leather-plaited button to which clung some shreds of brownish fabric.

Mr. Lefty Henson smiled grimly as he headed his newly acquired car southward. He had reason to smile. From being a hunted fugitive on foot he was now transformed into an unostentatious motorist driving a car which was exactly like the millions of others of similar make which infest the highways. He had money in one pocket and a sturdy gun in another. The gas tank of the car was nearly full of gas—more than enough to carry him beyond the international border for which he headed. True, the number plates of the car could be traced. But plates can also be changed. His first care must be to switch plates with any car he might find parked by the roadside.

There was one other pressing need for his safety—a change of clothes. He wished he could have taken the clothes from the man who owned the car. That would have solved his problem, but he had been scared away too soon. He now had two courses open to him. Either he could stop boldly in the first town he came to and buy an outfit to replace the rough garb of the road gang, which was too obviously the property of the State prison, or he could hold up the first lonely traveler he might meet on the road.

He decided in favor of the latter plan. He could not be sure of making such purchase in safety and without arousing suspicion. He could be quite sure that the victim of a holdup, bereft of his clothes and shoes, would be unable to give a quick alarm. For that matter, he could leave his next victim in a position never to give an alarm. He could shoot to kill. Why not? If ever he should be caught he would surely be hanged for the murder of the guard. The law allows no such dealings with its own minions. They could do no more than hang him if he murdered a dozen or a hundred of his fellow men now. He could be hanged but once. It was easy.

As it proved, it was easier even than he had hoped for. He did not have to stain his soul further with murder by intent. Luck—Lady Luck, the goddess of the gambler and the criminal—saved him from that. The victim of the chance did not look upon it as the workings of Lady Luck. His last word uttered on earth was a curse. Even Lefty at the moment of the impact did not look upon the incident as lucky. It was only after he had crawled out of his ditched car and found the body of the unknown man lying in the road that it occurred to him that here was luck so bewilderingly good as to be almost incredible.

The crash, and the consequent swerve which had ditched the car, had come at the moment of rounding a sharp corner. The man had been walking on the wrong side of the road. He had been knocked down, caught under the running board and dragged along on his face. Then the car had toppled into the ditch, leaving the body at the roadside. The man, tramp, or whatever he might have been, was dead. It dawned on Lefty that but for Lady Luck, he might himself be lying there dead as this luckless stranger.

Then came the thought—why not?

Gee! What a chance. He had only to change clothes with the dead man and the chances were that their respective identities would change with the clothes. He could dress the man in his road-gang outfit, array himself in the tramp's clothes, pitch the body into the ditch with the wrecked car and leave Lefty Henson there dead. True, it might not be a permanent switch of identity, but it would give him more time to make his get-away before the mistake was discovered. No hue and cry would continue on his trail for some time after this dead man was found in the car which Lefty was known to have stolen.

He searched the wreckage in the ditch and among the scattered tools and other débris found an electric torch. By its rays he examined the body. The man was about his own height, though more heavily built in shoulder and chest. His features were quite unrecognizable. He had been dragged along on his face for a considerable distance before the car overturned. He might or might not have been like Lefty in features. None could say very definitely by simply looking. Later, they might finger print the body and determine that this was not Lefty. But that meant delay and so much the more time for Lefty himself to get to cover. It was worth trying.

The tramp's clothes were not over-tempting. A well-worn coat, a dirty denim shirt and a pair of corduroy pants tucked into miner's boots. Dirty, but serviceable enough, and by no means conspicuous. The spot where the crash had occurred was a lonely one, bordering on a desert. It was unlikely that he would be disturbed in his grisly work. Anyhow, he had to take a chance. He took it.

Ten minutes later, the dead man with the pulped face was huddled within the wrecked car in the ditch. His clothes, torn and stained with crimson, were obviously the property of the State prison.

The gun with which the luckless prison guard had been shot, was in the dead man's pocket, as was also a letter addressed to Mr. Henson by one of his pals of the underworld. To all but experts the man lying dead in the wreck was Lefty Henson.

A half mile distant, striding south over the desert trail, the real Lefty Henson hummed to himself a song of joy at his own providential death and resurrection. Resurrection under any name he might choose to assume.

Dawn found him close to the main pike which leads to the desert town of Mojave. Lefty had expected to find the highway as empty of traffic as the desert trails which he had followed during the night. To his surprise he found a steady stream of traffic running east to the desert town. From lordly limousines to battered flivvers cars purred or chugged over the paved highway. Through the dust of the roadside ambled mule teams hauling ancient and creaking wagons. Here and there be-whiskered men drove burros laden with bulky and misshapen packs.

From one of these last Lefty learned the news that there was a gold strike on the Mojave within easy distance of the main pike. Such strikes make their appearance from time to time. Nothing ever comes of them, but no prospector, be he old-timer or newly bankrupt Los Angeles realtor feels that such a chance can be passed by. Gold is where you find it. It may be that the last strike is the big strike. If so, let's go. Maybe we can repair our broken fortunes.

Lefty Henson was not vastly interested. He had heard of these Mojave strikes before. He had never heard that anybody was much the richer for them, but it seemed to him that Lady Luck still smiled on him. A gold strike, even a fabulous Mojave strike, means a rush of all kinds of people to the alleged discovery. Such a rush covers the trail of any individual who may

be with it or cross its path. At any ordinary time a lone tramp passing through Mojave town might attract attention. In a crowd such as this he would be comfortably lost. Lefty strode along with renewed courage.

In Mojave he bought food and a water bag. Then, leaving the main pike, he slept through the afternoon heat in the shade of an empty shack at some distance from the road. When he woke, night had fallen again. Lefty, following directions he had obtained before taking his much-needed siesta, skirted the town and again struck south on the desert trail.

When dawn came again to light the cool desert space with colors which defy description, he found himself near habitation. A desert ranch, neat and orderly, such as you may find dotted here and there in the great arid waste. Lady Luck again. Here he could perhaps buy breakfast and certainly replenish his water bag. Without arousing suspicion he could, by careful questioning, confirm or disaffirm the belief that this trail would lead him eventually to the border which he anxiously desired to cross as soon as possible. He approached the neat ranch house and knocked boldly on the door. Presently it was opened by an olive-tinted girl. She gave him a smile of welcome.

"Can I get food and water?" he asked, adding in explanation, "I missed the trail last night. I'm bound for this gold strike."

The girl smiled again. "*Si, señor,*" she said. Then her glance traveled from Lefty's face to his clothes. She gave a little startled cry and drew back. "What's eatin' you?" inquired Lefty.

The girl recovered her composure. Her dark eyes flashed to Lefty's face again. This time there was no welcome in them.

"Nothing, señor. I—I have a toothache."

"That's not so good," commented

Lefty, genially. "It's a helluva way to the dentist from here."

"It is nothing, señor. Step within. I will call my father."

Lefty entered. The girl closed the door.

"Be seated, señor, if you please," she said. "My father is down at the corral. I will call him." She crossed the room to the open window and called. Her shrill cry was answered by a man's voice at some distance from the house.

Presently a swarthy man dressed in overalls and a wide straw hat came to the window. He was Mexican in type except for one feature. His eyes were that pale blue found sometimes in half-breeds or throw backs of that race. He stared coldly at the visitor. Then he spoke in Spanish to his daughter.

"*Si,*" replied the girl briefly.

Lefty, watching his host, thought that he caught a baleful glitter in the man's pale eyes. The rancher strode around the house and entered the room. He surveyed Lefty with another cold stare. Then he spoke again in his mother tongue to his daughter. Without reply the girl went out. Lefty heard her voice outside the house calling a name. "José!"

Tension grew between the two men in the bare little ranch room. To ease it, Lefty repeated to the rancher the question he had already asked the girl.

"I need food and water," he said. "Can I get them here?"

"*Si, señor,*" replied the rancher briefly.

"I speak no Spanish," said Lefty.

The rancher smiled. "There is no need, señor. We are good Americans here. We use our mother tongue among ourselves. That is all. So the señor comes here to seek food and water?"

"Yes—and a little speed. I have to be on my way."

"We will do all in our power to help the señor on his way," said the rancher.

It seemed to Lefty that there was something of a threat in the tone. The feeling of uneasiness grew on him as silence fell again. The rancher made no move to get food. He stood watching Lefty with those pale, pitiless eyes. Lefty experienced a wave of fear. Could the man or the girl have recognized him? Hardly. His picture had adorned the front pages of the papers at the time of his trial but that was two years ago, and more.

A shadow fell across the window. Lefty looked up. Outside stood a tall young man. His features resembled those of the rancher who stared at him with cold blue eyes. His eyes, like those of the girl, were dark. Under his arm he carried a serviceable rifle. He muttered something in Spanish to the older man. Then he handed the rifle through the open window. The blue-eyed man took the weapon and faced Lefty. Again the wave of fear went through Lefty's shifty brain.

"What's the big idea?" he asked. "Put that gun away! What's the idea?"

For answer the rancher leveled the rifle at his uninvited guest.

"Put up your hands, señor!"

Lefty reached for the roof. Where was Lady Luck? This man must have somehow got wind of Lefty's escape and the murder of the guard.

The rancher spoke briefly to the man outside. The man left the window. Lefty could hear his footfalls rounding the house. The door opened and the tall youth strode to the visitor. He passed his hands over Lefty's tensed body.

"No gun?" inquired the older man.

The taciturn youth signaled a negative by a shake of his head. Lefty burst forth in vehement objection. "I ain't got no gat with me. If I had, I'd shot the daylight out o' you before you ever got started on this monkeyshine. What's the idea? A holdup?"

"Tie his hands, José," said the rancher.

The tall son of the house detached one of a bundle of raw-hide strips from a peg on the wall. He bound Lefty's wrists firmly behind Lefty's back.

"So!" said the older man. "Now, we will go outside."

"The hell we will!" blustered Lefty. "If this is a holdup and you want my dough, take it. There's more'n fifty bucks in my jeans. Let me fill my water bag and get out of here."

For answer, the man motioned to his son. The latter pushed the captive toward the door.

"Do not try to run, señor," cautioned the rancher. He pushed the muzzle of the rifle into the small of Lefty's back. "So! Under this cottonwood will do nicely."

The procession halted under one of the clump of trees flanking the house.

Lefty, with no choice in the matter, halted as he was told. He thought rapidly. He was not afraid of the gun in the hands of this sinister man. The rancher could have no object in shooting him unless he tried to make a get-away. It must be that one of these three had recognized him. Curse those photographs in the papers! Too many people had seen his portrait. That must be it. They had recognized him and the news of his escape must have spread farther than he had reckoned on. They would not have heard of Lefty Henson being found dead in the wreck of that stolen car. But they might have heard of the escape.

They were going to tie him to this tree and hold him here for the sheriff. The nearest sheriff was in Mojave, or maybe at the new gold camp. Anyway, it would take hours to get him here. In that time anything might happen. If he kept his head he might make a get-away. God pity these skunks if he got his hands free and on that gat. He could wriggle out somehow. He

wouldn't go near any house again until his beard had grown. He wouldn't be caught napping again. The only thing to do now was to keep quiet and hope they wouldn't truss him too tight. Yes. That was the idea. They were going to tie him to the tree, for there was that young Mexican swinging a rawhide rope in his hand. What—what was that the man was saying?

"You have two minutes, señor, to make your peace with God—if you believe in God."

Believe in God! What did he mean? Where was Lady Luck?

The tall youth swung the rawhide rope over a limb of the cottonwood. The noose at the end of the rope dangled before Lefty's face.

Stark, cold fear ran riot through Lefty's crooked brain. "You—you ain't goin' to bump me off?" he gasped. "What for? I ain't done no harm to you. I come here for food and water! I can pay——"

"You will pay, señor," snapped the rancher. "You will pay in full. You see, señor, there is a button missing from your coat."

"You ain't goin' to bump me off for that, are you?"

"No, señor, not because the button is missing from your coat but because the missing button is here—see!" He drew from his vest pocket a button. Just a button, but similar to the two remaining buttons on the well-worn brown coat exchanged by Mr. Henson for his prison-camp garb. The button was of plaited leather. To it adhered a few shreds of the brown fabric of the coat.

"You got me guessing," said Lefty. "Where'd you get that from?"

"You left it here, señor, the night before last."

"But I ain't never been here before!"

"Are you sure, señor? Desert ranches are much alike. The desert itself is deceptive. I do not blame you

for your mistake. I do not think you would have been such a fool as to come here again if you had recognized the place."

"I tell you I've never been here before."

"Then, señor, is it not strange that this button should be here waiting for you?"

"Curse the button. Where'd you get it, anyway?"

"It rolled from my daughter's hand, señor, after you struck her down."

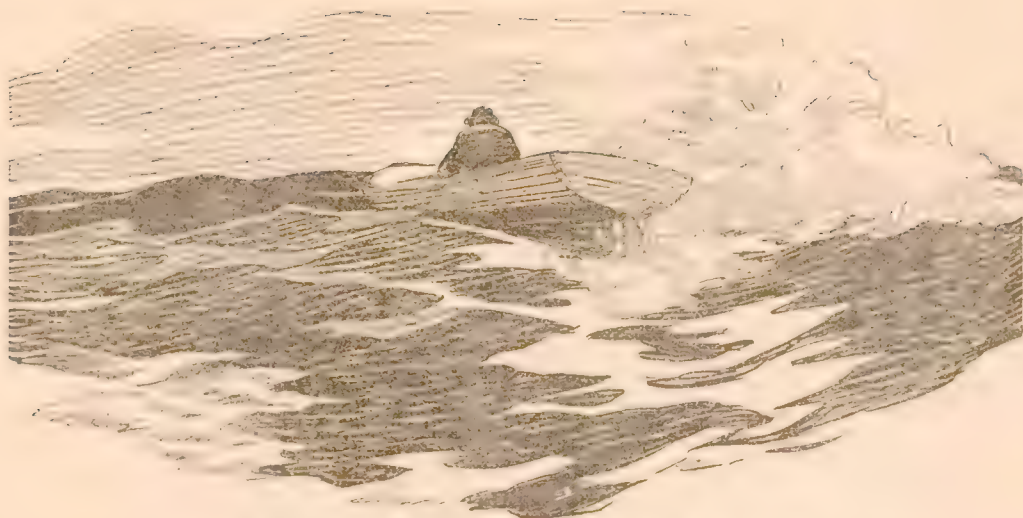
"I tell you I've never seen your house or your daughter before!"

"Strange, señor, is it not, that my daughter should have recognized you, and that this button, torn by her from your coat and missing now from that same coat—but why go into wearisome detail which is already familiar to you? You have one minute to make your peace with God—if you believe in God."

Lefty Henson, silenced by the deadly calm and earnestness of his self-appointed judge, and bewildered at the turn of events which appeared to have parted him altogether from Lady Luck, shook with fear. Drops of perspiration broke out on his grimy forehead. This swine meant business. They were going to bump him off. They weren't even going to shoot him. This young devil, José, was pulling the noose over his head.

Lefty forgot his God and his prayers as he felt the rawhide tighten round his neck. Curse that tramp! Curse everything! Well, the darned tramp had got his anyway. Served him right for wearing a coat with buttons like that.

He felt the noose tighten under the combined weight and strength of the two men who hauled steadily on the end of the rawhide. He stopped cursing and screamed for mercy. The scream ended in a gurgle as he was lifted from the ground and hung writhing and kicking at the end of the rope.



WEEDED OUT

By Frederick Ames Coates

Author of "Covered with Wax," etc.

BY pressing more firmly with his foot on the gas throttle Philip Insley responded to the exhilaration of the stiff, cool breeze. A noticeable leap forward was the response given by his car—the car, rather, that would be his when he had made eight more monthly payments on it. He shot past the straggling row of beach cottages which lined the muddy little bay, and entered the densely wooded strip whose shade was always such a welcome part of the trip on a hot day.

To-day promised to be warm later on; say, by mid-afternoon. Since it was Saturday, the beaches would all be crowded later. Insley was of half a mind to continue out to the Samoset Beach Country Club immediately, instead of stopping to transact the rather dreaded errand which was his real excuse for the trip. He would no doubt find enough fellows there to make up a set of doubles, and they would have no competition for a court. Or he could take a dip in the surf before lunch.

Yet even as his mind dallied with the thought, his eyes were scanning the growth of underbrush at the left for the opening which marked the entrance to Justin Breck's domain. Business first. It probably wouldn't take him long, anyway, he reflected optimistically. The very thought of old Breck, with his lean face that seemed almost always covered with a three-day growth of red bristles, and his sullen, suspicious eyes, seemed to chill the air. Philip Insley laughed. It was the drive through the woods, of course, where the sunlight only feebly penetrated, that accounted for the chill. But Breck was likely to be sore, no doubt of it. There might be an unpleasant half or three quarters of an hour. After that—Samoset Beach and the country club.

Justin Breck's driveway was little more than a path from which the underbrush had been cleared, flanked by a crudely painted sign which warned trespassers under penalty of the law. Before Insley had traversed it more than five car lengths, he was completely

out of sight of the main road. Lurching from side to side with the unevenness of the ground, he drove up the slight incline for a distance of perhaps a hundred and fifty feet. At that point the clearing widened, giving space enough to turn around. Insley drove his car into the clearing and, by backing and advancing, got it into a position heading again toward the main road. Experience had taught him to drive no farther. Old Breck, of course, drove his own battered flivver over the brow of the hill and right down into his yard, but Insley did not care to risk his springs. He glanced once at the suit case in the tonneau, decided that both it and the locked car were safe enough, and turned away.

A few steps brought him to the crest. Down the seaward slope the evergreen growth was stunted, being little more than underbrush. Below him Insley saw the sunbeams dancing from the choppy waves, the ancient, shingle-sided house of Justin Breck, with its lean-to shed that served as a garage, and the boathouse jutting out over the water's edge. At either end of the tract a rocky, jutting point protected the bay. Between these wooded points old Breck was monarch of all he surveyed.

"Fit for a king!" breathed Philip Insley. "And the old fool won't sell. A stretch of sandy beach nearly as good as the one out at Samoset, and much better than those mud flats I passed on the way here. A view from this ridge that can't be equaled. And all he does is sit tight here and tend his lobster pots and warn people off as trespassers! If he'd only let me, I could make both of us rich out of this property!"

Starting to descend the path, Insley heard the slam of a door in the weather-beaten house ahead. Breck was shambling over to the boathouse. Philip Insley opened his lips to call, but changed his mind. Like every good salesman, he had learned the value of

having the element of surprise on his own side. Besides, Breck would not have time to get his motor boat started and be off before his visitor arrived.

Insley found the door ajar and peered into the semidarkness of the boathouse. Breck was in the act of climbing out of the little twenty-foot launch, where he had been tinkering with the motor, back onto the platform which ran along both sides of the boathouse and joined the wider floor at the rear. Insley stepped in and closed the door behind him so that the spring catch clicked.

"I hope you've decided to sell that strip on this side of the point, Mr. Breck," began Insley in his most ingratiating tones. "My offer is still good. In fact——"

"Insley! It's Insley himself!" exclaimed the man, wiping the grease from his hands. "Mighty convenient you come just now. I was just getting out the boat to run over to town to see you."

"That so?" Philip Insley professed polite interest. "I thought maybe you were getting ready to go out after lobsters."

"No," said Breck grimly. "I was aiming to go after a shark to-day—lobsters can wait. But since you're here I——"

Philip Insley flushed. He had been called worse than a shark during his checkered career, and by those whose words carried more weight than Breck's. But here his reputation had been fairly good, and it was business policy to keep it so. A rising young real-estate operator needs the reputation for honesty, whatever the fact may be. And Breck's hostility thus early in the interview augured badly for its successful termination.

"Why, Mr. Breck! Here I'm laying myself out to make money for you—and for myself, incidentally, of course—on that tract along the ridge that you gave me an option on, and you treat me

as if I were a thief who had come to steal the teeth out of your head! Now, if you'd only see reason, and give me an option on that strip of beach in the bay here that I was talking about—a strip adjoining that inland plot, that would quadruple its value——”

Breck regarded him from beneath level eyebrows. “Yes; and have you turn the place into a hive of summer idlers! That's been your idea all along, and I knew it right well. One end of Breck's Bay, full of cheap bungalows and loud-mouthed people in indecent bathing suits throwing tin cans and cracker boxes and other rubbish all over the landscape! There's rubbish enough here now, the way the tide sets in here, carrying heaps of dead seaweed and driftwood and such. But that's nature's own rubbish. I ain't going to have human rubbish, too, in this bay—not while I own it!”

“But, Mr. Breck,” persisted Insley in his pleasantest manner, “when you sold me those two acres you must have known perfectly well that their value consisted in their nearness to the water front, the beach. But if they can't have access to the beach——”

“Just a minute, young fellow!” interrupted Breck harshly. “Don't go talking about what I sold you. I didn't sell you a foot of ground. I gave you an option on it, with a down payment and another due in thirty days, and a provision that the land wasn't to be subdivided into those cheap bungalow lots, but kept as one parcel. The full purchase price was to be due when you sold the land. Is that right?”

“Substantially right,” agreed Philip Insley. He watched nervously as the other reached into his trousers pocket and brought out a shiny leather wallet.

“That second payment was due last week. Two hundred dollars. You sent me a check for it. I've got it here.” He flaunted the slip of paper before Insley's eyes. “The bank wouldn't cash

it! It was due the thirteenth, and you dated it the thirty-first! What kind of business do you call that, eh?”

Philip Insley smiled in the teeth of the other's mounting anger. Of the many tricks he knew, he employed the postdated check only rarely, though he considered it one of the safest. It was so easy to explain.

“A mistake!” he grinned. “That's one on me. Not unnatural, either—a transposition of the two figures. I'll give you——”

He hesitated. A check for two hundred dollars against his account to-day would be dishonored, he knew, for a different reason: lack of funds. It was a piece of bad luck that Breck had discovered the deception. The old fellow rarely went to the city more than once a month. Insley had been confident that the trick would escape unnoticed.

Breck seemed temporarily to have lost interest in it now. “I been learning a few things, since this started me to suspecting your slick crookedness,” he went on with mounting anger. “I looked over my copy of that option that you drew, supposed to be according to my terms. That part about not subdividing the land says that *you* agree not to subdivide it, but it don't say anything that'd bind the person you sell to! It took Lawyer Hartwell to show me the catch in it, and it was him that found out something else for me, too. You've sold that land already, young fellow, and the man you sold it to is going ahead cutting it up into cottage lots!”

Philip Insley gulped. So the old fellow had been to a lawyer! And he had learned every one of the things of which the real-estate man had hoped he would remain for a while in ignorance. Insley had been half prepared for the discovery of the check business, but not for this. Who would think that the hermit would have crawled out of his shell as if for the express purpose of

accumulating information against him? All the more reason now to persuade him to sell that beach tract. Insley already had an offer for that, to go with the other—an offer that would put him nicely into the clear.

"Mr. Breck, you don't see this thing quite as I do—as most people do. Progress, development—I've been trying to make you help them along in spite of yourself. It's the public's interest; no one man can stop it. It's your interest, too, if you can only see it! I can make it your interest. That beach property, now; I can name a sum——"

"You'll name nothing to me!" growled Justin Breck. "I'm done with you. Almost, that is. Just one matter of business left. Under the option, full payment was due me when you sold the land. You sold it four days ago, and the deed's recorded. Have you got the money for me now?"

Philip Insley opened his lips to temporize, took one look at the other's out-thrust jaw, and changed his mind. He did not have the money just now, for what he had received had melted away. Some had gone as sops to creditors, some had gone into other options. With a couple of weeks' leeway, which he had counted on, all would have been well. Just his luck that this stupid old fellow, whom he had thought would be the last to press him, should come down on him now! It was his past experience that had got Insley into this fix—his habit, as a seller of doubtful stocks, of looking on all cash in hand as his legitimate capital. Here he'd been trying to conduct an honest business, and——

"Surely," he smiled. "I've got my pocket check book here." He drew it from his inner pocket and reached for his fountain pen. His mind was desperately active, seeking ways and means of accumulating a deposit to cover the check.

"And when you've written it," continued Breck, "we'll march right over to the house and telephone the bank. You write checks so mighty easy, young fellow!"

Insley paled and snapped the check book shut. "I might as well admit, Mr. Breck, that this check right now would cramp me seriously. In a couple of days—a week, say—I'll be able——"

"Then you ain't got the money now!" said Justin Breck with harsh satisfaction. "And I've got this other no-good check right in my pocket! I guess you're at the end of your rope, mister. There's going to be telephoning done just the same, but it ain't to the bank. It's to the police!"

He took a resolute step toward the door. Insley was in a sudden panic. He had not contemplated this as a possibility. Arrest! He didn't believe, even yet, that the law could do much about it. He had actual assets, more than enough to cover Breck's claim. If this were the only affair—but it was not. Some others of the real-estate man's dealings were a little too involved to stand the light of day, and his arrest would bring them all crashing down about him. And in the background, worst of all, was the sinister shadow of the brief prison term he had served. An arrest and a scandal now would almost certainly result in his being identified as the young man who had been convicted, some years since, of conducting swindling operations in worthless stock in a certain up-State city!

"Breck!" he called hoarsely. "Wait a minute! Listen to reason!"

"Out of my way, young fellow!" growled Breck, thrusting Insley with rough hands from his path to the door. "I'm going to phone the police. You can talk reason to them!"

"You mustn't!" Philip Insley threw himself in the other man's way, clutched at him frantically.

Justin Breck, overbalanced at the sudden onslaught, toppled sidewise and bumped his elbow painfully against the boarded side of the boathouse. With a bellow of rage he sprang forward, his fists doubled.

Again Philip Insley threw himself in the way, between Breck and the closed door. One heavy fist crashed into Insley's ribs, knocked the breath from him. He clutched wildly at the wall for support. His fingers found a rail that ran horizontally along it, a little more than waist high; a rail whose upper surface, as he had previously noticed, was a sort of catchall for fishhooks, spark plugs, and other odds and ends. But now his fingers touched something different—something he had not known was there.

In an instant his hand closed about the handle of the fish knife.

In another instant it was over. Justin Breck sagged to the floor, with the knife handle sticking grotesquely from his chest. Philip Insley, standing before him, was regaining his breath and fighting back the nausea that had come suddenly upon him.

His first thought was to look about him fearfully. The door behind him was closed and latched. Besides, any intruders who might be bold enough to trespass on Breck's land certainly would steer clear of his boathouse.

At the other end of the little building, the water gates, made of spaced pickets, were also closed. Between their bars Insley could see out across the bay. There were no boats in sight within a mile. Moreover, the comparative darkness inside the shack made observation from that direction impossible, even from near by. For the immediate present he was safe from discovery.

He stooped with loathing, and assured himself that the man on the floor was dead. A trickle of blood that was dripping to the floor held his fascinated attention. Insley looked about wildly,

and his eyes alighted on a large sponge that was evidently used for baling the boat. He took the sponge and stuffed it inside Breck's shirt, over the wound, removing the knife with his other hand. The shirt fitted tightly across the thick chest, and when buttoned again it held the sponge firmly in place, and the trickle stopped.

The murderer stepped down into the boat, almost losing his balance as it tipped beneath his sudden weight. He grasped at the gunwale and, leaning over, washed the telltale knife in the water. He clambered again to the platform and replaced the knife on the shelf where he had found it.

His impulse was to dash out the door and run at top speed as far as possible from the accusing body that lay on the floor. But his feet refused to move, and his mind refused to give the order. Even though no one had seen him come here—and he was quite certain that such was the case—it would be folly to leave the body for immediate discovery by the first comer. Concealment was vital, something to give a little time during which he might perfect an alibi.

Philip Insley began calculating the chance that suspicion would fall on him. Motive was what they always looked for. To the extent that his act had been unpremeditated, it had no valid motive. To be sure, there was this financial mess. That could no doubt be easily discovered by any one looking into Justin Breck's affairs. But that was as much of a mess as ever. The murder had not solved it, nor relieved Insley of any of his money obligations to the dead man. It would surely not be an obvious supposition that he had killed Breck because of these money troubles. Yet he might easily become a suspect, if only because of a lack of other suspects.

Meanwhile, there was the body to be disposed of.

An inspiration flashed into Philip Insley's groping mind. His intention had been to conceal the body, merely with the hope of delaying an inevitable discovery of the crime. Now he saw a way of preventing such discovery forever; at least, a more-than-even chance of doing so. Breck would be missed, of course. Even a recluse such as he must have some daily dealings with the outside world—with the grocer and the milkman and perhaps others. But there are many causes for disappearance—yes, other manners of death than murder!

Insley edged along the platform to the picket gates that let onto the water. They were hinged to swing outward. A padlock through two staples held them shut, but it was unlocked now. Evidently Justin Breck had completed his preparations for setting out. The murderer peered through the gates. The breeze which he had noted had stiffened, if anything. Within the bay, marked by the two jutting points which were Breck's boundaries, the water was choppy. Beyond the seaward point a rather heavy swell was rolling in, topped by angry whitecaps.

Insley hurried back and grasped the body. It was a distasteful task and one requiring heavy exertion. Fortunately the boat's gunwale, at this tide, was below the level of the platform, so there was no direct lifting required. In a few minutes Breck was propped up in that seat in the boat which he would have been occupying in life but for the fatal interruption.

Insley arranged the stiff hands on the steering wheel, bent the fingers around its rim. He also wedged one knee against the under side of the wheel to hold it firm. There must be no deviating, no veering of the boat. Fortunately, Breck was evidently in the habit of backing the launch into the house, so that it was now headed outward. The rudder was quite straight. It

really should be able to hold an even course.

Insley next wet a bit of rag in water and scrubbed out the small red stain on the boathouse floor. He then rummaged about for something weighty. He found the ideal article in an old anchor, a heavy one, intended for a much larger boat than this. He deposited it carefully on the little forward deck of the boat. The deck had no rail, and the metal cleat on each side of its smooth surface merely afforded good opportunity to wedge the anchor into place, so that it would not slip off too easily. He then found a length of rope, tied it firmly about the corpse under the arms, and fastened its other end in the ring of the anchor.

With the boat headed directly out to sea, it would take the waves broadside on. Those waves, once it got beyond the sheltering point, were of a size to capsize the boat. When that happened, the anchor would slide from the deck and drag the body with it, down to the bottom. There was deep water beyond the point.

The boat would probably remain afloat and be found. It was more than likely that the "accident" would be seen from somewhere on shore. People would put out to the rescue. Failing to find Justin Breck or his body, they would assume that the shifting waters had carried him beyond discovery, unless an accident of the tide should cast him up somewhere, perhaps dozens of miles away.

There would be no further search. In a lake or a river there might be dragging for a body, but one does not drag the ocean. The dread secrets of its depths scorn man's feeble efforts at solving them. The obvious and only explanation would be accidental drowning. There would be wondering, of course, as to why a seasoned boatman like Breck would drive his craft ahead broadside to a heavy sea, but that was

as far as it would get. Nearly every fatal accident is due to the inexplicable carelessness of some one who should know better.

The perfection of the plan put new heart into Philip Insley. He started the boat's motor and then, from the platform, he pushed the water gates open with a boat hook. Returning, he lay on the platform and reached over downward to throw in the clutch. Suddenly he stiffened in terror at a sound which had drifted to him, an unmistakably human sound.

He shut off the engine and listened. It was a shrill laugh—an incongruous sound to penetrate this dim house of horror. A woman's laugh, and a voice.

"I don't care! We can stay till he puts us off, the old crab! That is, if he *can* put us off."

Trespassers! Picknickers, camped within a hundred feet of the boathouse, and prepared to stay! Strangers they must be, or they wouldn't dare to thus beard Breck in his own preserves. But that made no difference to Philip Insley. He couldn't outstay them. There was too much danger in that, besides the horror of being cooped up here with his victim.

In one way, their presence helped his plan. He could be sure now that some one would see the boat start on its journey. But he had been practically certain of that before. Somewhere along the shore, or from other boats on the water, it could not go unnoticed when Breck, sitting stiffly behind the wheel, headed out to sea. If only he could turn the intruders' presence to account in other ways!

Philip Insley wriggled out of his coat and stooped to unlace his shoes. He rapidly disrobed, under the urge of a sudden idea which had fortunately come to him, and made a compact bundle of his clothes, tying it with cords. In the center of the bundle he had wrapped a two-foot length of heavy iron pipe,

which had evidently seen service as a roller. Through this, from end to end, he passed another cord and attached other weights. Then he tossed it into the boat. This did not quite satisfy him. He picked it up and jammed it underneath the anchor on the deck. It was quite as important that the bundle should find a permanent resting place on the sea floor as that the body should!

Again he started the motor, its noise temporarily shutting out the laughing and talking of the unseen trespassers. He let the clutch in and gave the boat a shove. For minutes he watched it, heading straight, with the choppy waves slapping against its side. It passed beyond the fringe of heavy seaweed, drifting just below the surface, which might have deflected it or clogged its propeller. It was holding a true course. Nothing could save it from tipping over when it got into the trough of the heavy swell beyond the point. From the sounds ashore he knew that the picnic party had noticed it.

As soon as they had opportunity to direct their attention elsewhere, Philip Insley let himself into the water. With his feet on the sandy bottom, he closed the water gates and started swimming. For a little space he would be protected from sight from the shore by the boat-house bulk. After that—it was a chance he must take. At any rate, no one could identify him from a glimpse of his head as he swam. If they saw him at all, they could hardly tell with certitude whether it was a swimming man or a bit of driftwood or a clump of seaweed. He kept his arms under water and swam low. He did not look back, but from time to time he listened. Apparently his going was unnoticed.

He let the insetting tide carry him, and picked a spot for landing where a cluster of rocks afforded a shelter and where bushes grew close to the high-tide level. In a moment he gained the shelter of the thick woods and plunged

ahead, carefully avoiding scratches, though not because of the pain of them. There was little chance of losing his way. If he kept straight ahead he was bound to come in sight of the main Samoset Beach road. By veering he brought up accurately at the clearing where he had left his own car.

To his relief, it was undisturbed, and there was nothing to indicate that any one had been by here. A party arriving on foot, as the picnickers evidently had, would naturally have left the electric car at the regular stop, a quarter of a mile below, and used another path to Breck's Bay.

Philip Insley quickly opened the suit case and tumbled out a complete outfit of clothing, including tennis flannels and shoes and even a change of underwear. Sitting on the running board, he carefully brushed and picked off the bits of seaweed which clung to his legs. Soon he was dressed and seated at the wheel of the car. His arriving at the Samoset Club in tennis costume would excite no comment, even though he did commonly change after he got there. His bathing suit he did not remove from the suit case.

In spite of the interlude which seemed to him to have filled hours and hours with horror, Insley was one of the early arrivals at the club. He played a set at tennis and then ate a leisurely lunch. The absence of his pocketbook did not trouble him. There had been little in it, and he could sign the dinner check here where he was known. In the early afternoon he lolled on the porch in the sunlight. He found that he could play his part in the idle conversation perfectly well, such was the sense of relief and security which had come to him with the perfect working of his plan.

"What say to a swim?" asked one of his cronies suddenly.

"Nothing doing, Peters," said Insley. "Is it an hour since we ate?"

"Will be, by the time we get ready."

"I'm not keen about it, Jack," confessed Insley. "As a matter of fact, I mind the cold. I haven't been in the water yet this summer." He yawned and stretched luxuriously. It was the truth, except for his unpremeditated dip that morning.

Jack Peters derisively tossed a newspaper at him. "Quit kidding me, Phil! You——"

He broke off and inclined his head toward the door, where excited voices were heard. Then he leaped to his feet and went in.

He returned shortly to the porch.

"Old Justin Breck was drowned from his motor boat a while ago," he announced. "Did you know him, Phil? Queer duffer. Brought up on the water, too. Well, that's always the way. It always seems to be the strongest swimmers and the best sailors that get drowned. Too bad!"

Insley gripped the arms of his chair, but the other, looking out across the water, was not noticing him. He moved toward the door.

"Who discovered it?" he asked, striving to put into his voice exactly the right amount of curiosity and the correct admixture of gravity and awe.

"Several people saw him capsize, as I get it," said Peters. "The fellows in the smoking room can tell more about it. I wonder if Hartwell, the lawyer, has heard the news? I understand he was Breck's attorney, and he was coming out here for golf this afternoon. I'm going to hunt him up."

Philip Insley made his way into the smoking room and mingled with the crowd. The details by this time had become pretty well known. Breck's launch had been towed, bottom up, to the shore. The body had not been found. A little half-hearted grappling had been abandoned, owing to the depth of water off the point and the heavy run of the tide, which would not

have allowed any drifting object to remain in the same spot. Insley found it easy to remain in the background. No one here had any idea that the tragedy was of more than passing interest to him.

He managed to employ the afternoon in tennis, and he even accepted a friend's invitation to go for a sail. When he drove back to the city that night his shaken nerves were entirely restored. He was completely confident that his crime had passed into the realm of the undiscoverable, thanks to his presence of mind and his ingenuity. All that remained to do was to raise sufficient cash to meet his debt to Breck's estate when the executor should demand payment. Since the appointment of the executor would take some time, he would be able to do that. It would be just as well, though, to bolster up his bank account immediately to cover that postdated check which Breck held. But—that check had gone to the bottom with Breck!

Monday morning things broke well for Philip Insley. He put through two deals which went far toward accumulating the money against the Breck payment. He even felt emboldened to get in touch with Hartwell by telephone. The Sunday paper, carrying accounts of the tragedy, had stated that Lawyer Hartwell was temporarily handling the dead man's affairs, pending a search for possible relatives and the action of the court relative to his estate.

He located the lawyer at his office shortly before noon and announced his identity. "I owed Breck some money on a piece of land I sold for him," he announced. "Several hundred dollars that I should have paid last week, but neglected. What'll I do about it now?"

"Better sit tight till an executor's appointed," advised Hartwell. "There's no one empowered to accept payment now. By the way, I want to get some information about your deals with

Breck. I'm trying to get his affairs in shape, but he was a queer one for hiding receipts and all sorts of documents around the house. I'm not sure that we've found them all. 'Can you give me a statement of all your transactions with him, if I run over this afternoon?'"

"Surely," agreed Insley. "I'll be here any time you say. Two o'clock? Fine!"

The lawyer arrived as he had promised, unfolded a memorandum sheet from his pocket, and sat at Insley's desk to make notes upon it. For five minutes he questioned the real-estate man. Philip Insley gave him a thoroughly straight story, except for mention of the lost check. That two hundred dollars he could treat as so much profit.

A tap sounded at the door, and it opened to admit a stranger. "Excuse me, Mr. Hartwell. Almost finished here?"

"Quite," said Hartwell. He gathered his papers, folded them, and put them back into his pocket. "By George!" he exclaimed suddenly. "I nearly ran off with your pen. This is yours, isn't it?"

Philip Insley took the plain fountain pen which he tendered. "Yes."

"Just a minute, though. I thought I had a pen with me when I left the office. Are you sure that this one is yours?"

The real-estate man inspected it closely. "Positive. It's a common-enough kind, but this dent in the clip, where I dropped it one day, identifies it."

Hartwell nodded to the stranger. "All right, officer! You heard the identification!"

Philip Insley went suddenly white. Officer!

"What—what do you mean?" he gasped.

"You're under arrest," said the stranger quietly. "I'm from headquarters. I warn you right now that anything you say——"

Lawyer Hartwell smiled sadly at Insley. "Justin Breck didn't patronize banks very much," he explained. "I happened to know that he usually kept considerable sums of cash on hand, as well as deeds and other papers. We had quite a hunt finding them—pulling up loose floor boards and what not. Don't know that we've found everything yet. But under the board flooring of his boathouse we found blood that had dripped through the cracks!"

Insley suppressed a gasp at the startling information. If he could only keep his head now, perhaps he could devise a way out, as he had done before. Although, now that they had reason to think Breck had been murdered and his body weighted, they might grapple over the spot of the tragedy with better hope of success!

"Even when it looked like murder," continued Hartwell, "there wasn't the slightest clew as to who might be the killer. There were some picnickers on Breck's land at the time. They were suspected, but soon cleared, and they had seen or heard nothing suspicious. Not a clew, except this fountain pen

that was wedged between the floor boards of the capsized boat!"

Philip Insley cursed the luck which had made the pen lodge there when he had carelessly tossed his bundled clothing into the boat. With drawn face he listened in silence.

"It was a cheap pen of ordinary type, with no identifying marks, except as you supplied one just now. We knew Breck never owned such a pen, however. But among the thousands, perhaps, of owners of similar pens——

"My coming here was a guess, Insley. A guess based on one slight bit of untruth which did not fit into the pattern of innocence which you wove for yourself. I met Jack Peters at the Samoset Club Saturday afternoon. He'd just been with you. You had rather pointedly stated to him that you had not been in the water this season, and thought it was too cold to go in that day. But, as you said it, you stretched. And under your armpit, visible as your rolled sleeves fell back, were two unmistakable bits of that clinging, dried seaweed, stuck to your arm like court-plaster!"



STORE THIEF STEALS VALUABLE TAPESTRY

ONE of the large Fifth Avenue stores of New York was recently the victim of an ingenious thief who carried out a carefully planned robbery of a valuable tapestry worth ten thousand dollars. The thief remained in the store after closing time, it is believed, and when unobserved, went to the wall on which the tapestry hung, removed it, and walked out of the establishment. The tapestry was bought in Paris and it is thought that the thief followed it over to this country and then laid his plans to steal it as soon as it was placed on display. At first, it was left in a vault, but shortly before it was taken by the thief, it was brought out and hung up in the newly established antique department.

The tapestry portrays a knight in the costume of the Renaissance period, lifting his bride to his horse. Surrounding these central figures are several minor figures, and a narrow border of fruits and flowers. A reward of one thousand dollars was at once offered by the store for the recovery of the property or information leading thereto.



FORGERS AND FORGERY

KETCHUM AND THE GOLD CHECKS

By Edward H. Smith

Author of "Tapping the Bank of England," etc.



ON the fifteenth of August, 1865, the large Wall Street house of Ketchum, Son & Company suspended—failed for millions. Within an hour there was a mild panic in the Street, for this was one of the old, established, deeply trusted firms, that had weathered the worst storms of the Civil War without a tremor. The moneyed crowd at Saratoga for the races—then as now—shuddered and came scurrying back to town to find out how far-reaching was the damage. Banks closed their doors or pleaded with their depositors that they were not involved or that their losses had been slight. Meantime, the police were hunting for a stout little man of twenty-six, the recreant cause of all this infamy. He was Edward B. Ketchum, the son of the head, and his name will remain for other decades

among those of the most notable forgers on the long and muddy scroll of rascality.

Edward Ketchum was, of course, not a professional forger or a practiced criminal. Thus he belongs under a separate grouping of the worthies of the past and present who made their way to other people's money, to prison and to sorry reputation by illicit use of the quill. He is one of a sadly numerous family of financiers who have in various times found themselves too close to golden opportunity to resist this easy and gentlemanly method of criminal acquisitiveness. Others will appear whose deeds must still be fresh in many memories.

The Ketchums were most distinguished financial men. They can hardly be called the Morgans of their time, for there was then no such dominant house

of money, and the Ketchum bank was by no means the largest of its day. But the Ketchum house was the clearing office for the Connecticut banks, and for other reasons it was regarded as one of the strongest in the Street. A few years before the events to be described, its chief had encountered trouble with the officers of the Stock Exchange. The elder Ketchum had been in a position sufficiently secure to defy the directors, withdraw from the Exchange and continue as an independent. His deposits were known to be more than five millions—a large sum for those days.

In the 1857 panic, when the regular banks quickly refused gold payments, Ketchum's private bank continued to pay in specie throughout and thereby gained confidence and respect. Again, in the suspension of 1861 and 1862, when the Confederate successes made the Northern dollar extremely skittish, Ketchum continued to pay in the brilliant-yellow metal long after the big public banks had gone upon the paper basis. And the Ketchums were known to be the heaviest holders of gold in New York when the currency began to depreciate. In short, here was a solid firm of the first rank, with a long record of exceptionally careful methods and the highest credit.

So much for the background of our subject. Young Edward B. Ketchum himself was a youth of his times and circumstances. He had been modestly schooled and taken into his father's firm at an early age, there soon acquiring an exaggerated reputation for shrewdness and financial talent. Needless to add, he had not gone to war. He was a fellow of the medium height, about five feet seven inches, portly, dressy, convivial and devoted to concealed charmers not of his own station. One of the commentators of his day says he might have been described as aristocratic-looking, save for a round smudge of a nose.

To comprehend the astounding things

the young man did, we must set the stage with still more detail. It was, of course, the end-of-the-war period of inflation and panic and wild gambling, of loose methods, morals and ethics, of amazing financial brigandage, of whirlwind fortune making and fortune losing. Things were happening then without striking much fire from the public apathy, that would cause ferments and furies of indignation to-day. Men dwelt in a world emotionally worn out through the terrors and frights and disappointments of the war, through the suspense and the grief, through the hollow cheers of victory and the salt tears at many graves. Jaded men could feel no more. They took enormities for commonplaces and crimes for coups of cleverness.

In the 1863 recovery of the sadly depressed market, the Ketchum firm had been on the right side and made a great deal of money. Again, between June, 1864, and January, 1865, Edward Ketchum himself made, according to the estimates of the day, almost a million dollars through his own operations. He lost it again a little later in an unfortunate railroad speculation, when a supposed colleague took advantage of information which he did not reveal to the young plunger. But that reverse does not seem to have damaged the repute of the broker or to have taken the shine off his glowing, earlier successes. He stood high with his firm and was allowed to do much as he pleased. The flatteries of his father's junior partners and employees no doubt had the effect of making the young fellow believe that he was some sort of genius, with apprehensions and intuition denied to other men.

Something of the sort must have controlled Ketchum's brain when he permitted himself to form a theory of the war's results. In the first weeks of 1865, as any one could see, the South was entering upon the final phase and

rapidly approaching collapse. The men in the Street naturally tried to calculate what would be the results of a victorious peace. Most of them sanely decided that there would be a business revival, perhaps to be followed by a temporary market decline. But Ketchum took the opposite view. He saw that the war profiteers would be ruined by peace, that inflated prices must come down, that the currency must be brought back to normal value and that the easy money of the preceding four years would not be forthcoming. From these premises he reasoned that there would be a general collapse, a sinking and expiring market and a great chance to clean up by selling short. And he proceeded to follow his nose into this perilous forest.

He sold "short" everything he could think of and he continued to sell in spite of all omens and warnings, until he was said to be carrying a total of about twenty-five million dollars' worth of stocks. No one seemed to question his resources or to doubt that he had the means to handle so vast a speculation, though it was certain that he and not his father's firm was "in the market." No one seemed to ask where he got all the money and credit, else he could never have carried out his great crime. To make clear how the thing was done one must understand the gold-check system.

The blanks on which these gold checks were issued could be bought of stationers, and the Bank of New York issued books of them to their trusted customers on receipt of a moderate deposit. These checks were numbered and the bank kept a record of the numbers issued to various customers, so there might be no trouble about identifying certificates as they came in. All that was needed to make these gold checks as good as the metal and absolutely acceptable legal tender was to have them signed by the registrar and teller of the

bank, the drawer himself and one indorser. That done, they passed current as easily as modern bank or government notes of similar denominations—more freely, in fact. Naturally, before the signatures of the bank officers could be got, the drawer would have to place the proper amount of gold in the vaults, just as gold is now placed in the Federal treasury to guarantee the gold certificate of to-day.

The gold-check system was invented to make the transfer of money and the transaction of business easier and swifter, to be sure, but criminality again was not without its influence. Before gold checks came into use it was the habit to deal in gold by weight. The coins were placed in canvas bags and, instead of being tediously counted by clerks, were thrown upon scales and weighed. A five-thousand-dollar bag had to come up to a certain poundage. The crooks, to trim their good banking friends, proceeded to load the gold bags with iron washers and with counterfeit coins; merely dipped in gold. To stop such practices the gold checks were invented. The man who deposited his bag of gold and was given the check stood good for any shortage or other lack in his mass of metal.

Edward Ketchum used gold checks to finance his great and disastrous speculation. He used other valuables as well, but it was the employment of these certificates about which his crime and fall revolved.

Late in May, 1865, the firm of Ketchum, Son & Co. was considerably embarrassed by rumors that it was speculating, a thing certain to hurt its credit and cause conservative correspondents and depositors to draw in. The fact was that young Edward Ketchum was the speculator, and in his own name, not that of the firm. But his operations had become so vast that the Street naturally inferred his father and partners must be behind him. There

were denials and protests, but nothing was done toward an investigation of the young man's activities or a curbing of his actions. On June first, however, one of the partners, a man named Swan, discovered that nine hundred and ninety-five thousand dollars' worth of government securities were missing from the Ketchum safes. He suspected the son of the head and asked Edward about it. The young man, without the least hesitation, admitted that he had taken and was using the securities. He said they were in his control and that they would be returned in a few days, as soon as he was able to get out of a few lines he was carrying.

It is not hard to imagine what a partner in a modern Wall Street banking house would do if he found that the senior's son had taken out of the vault nearly a million in securities, the very spine of the house's credit, and frankly admitted he was using them to back speculations. But those were the wild and brigandish days in the Street. Mr. Swan merely remonstrated mildly and told the young man that the securities must be returned in a short time or he would have to do something about it. Just what, he did not venture to say.

The truth was that Edward Ketchum had used the vital properties of his father's firm to guarantee his margins. They were not in his control and he could not return them because, to all intents and purposes, he had already lost them through the upward leap of the market. He had begun his speculations toward the end of 1864, expecting, as already noted, a collapse to follow the impending peace. A few months afterward, when he was in to his neck, came the news of the repeated successes of Grant, Sherman and Sheridan, to be crowned with the surrender at Appomattox and the yielding of Johnston and Kirby Smith. Instead of falling, the market had begun bucking upward, and as it rose the star of Ed Ketchum

went down. So he had been wiped out by the time Partner Swan made his discovery and mild protest.

The ruined young plunger might have stopped here and been no worse than many another infatuated broker who has used not only his own but his firm's money for margining. Such offenses lead to expulsion and sometimes to criminal trials in this day—though rarely, indeed, to merited prison. In the hurly-burly post-bellum times they would have earned no more than reproof and tears and heartaches over the missing lucre.

But young Ketchum was an inflated man. He had heard about his own subtlety and cleverness. Some had called him a great trader and a genius, which things he had taken seriously. Also, what human being in all history has liked to draw back beaten? Ketchum still held doggedly to the idea that there must be a great market slump and, to tell the full truth, there was, but much too late to do him any good. So he looked about for ways further to protect his short-sold stocks with larger margins.

A broker by the name of Charles Graham, head of Graham & Co., which acted on the Exchange for the Ketchum firm, innocently furnished the weapons for the new adventure. One day in June, soon after the Swan interview, Charles Graham took Edward Ketchum to the Bank of New York, introduced the young man and, by making a deposit of a thousand dollars, got a book containing five hundred gold checks, all numbered, but unsigned. Each check called for five thousand dollars in gold and would have stood for that amount as soon as the metal was deposited in the vaults and the proper signatures were affixed.

Edward Ketchum did not have the gold or the means to buy it, but he had his firm's reputation behind him. Had not the Ketchum house been the largest gold holders in the depression of two

years before? Was it not famous for gold ownership and gold operations? Surely nothing would be thought if a large number of gold checks were offered by a member of this famous gold firm. So reasoning, Ed Ketchum sat him down under a lamp and proceeded to forge three hundred and forty-five of the gold checks for a total of one million seven hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars.

The man had little or no skill as a penman. He had never done any previous forging and he did not employ a confederate skilled in the scratcher's art. At least there is no record of such things in his trial or any such charge in the contemporary newspapers. But the deed he did required little skill or expertness. In his firm he had access to many genuine gold checks and other forms of security. He simply copied upon three hundred and forty-five of the blanks the signatures of Paul Bunder, registrar of the Bank of New York and Theodore Ward, its gold teller. Next he signed his own name as drawer of the check and depositor of the gold. Finally, he copied from any note or check that came to hand the signatures of business houses, brokers and bankers, and used them as indorsers. In a day when every young man in business had to be more or less of a penman and calligraphy was a much revered accomplishment—soon made antiquated by the typewriter—it was not strange for this man to be able to make these copies. The truth is they would not have passed had any one ever stopped to inspect them. But the Ketchum name was such that a doubt came not into any mind.

Ketchum now proceeded subtly enough. He did not put his forged gold checks into circulation, for that would have meant their return to the Bank of New York in a few days or a week and the early discovery of the fraud. Instead, he took them to bankers and brokers and used them to buy or margin

more stocks, always with the understanding that they were to be held and not used in the market. This must have seemed an extraordinary request to some, but Ketchum had a plausible explanation. If these checks got spread about it would soon be no secret that he was cornering gold. That would ruin his plans by bulling the gold market.

Such a plea found sympathetic ears among brokers, who not only believed the yarn, but proceeded to buy gold for themselves in anticipation of the high prices to result from the Ketchum corner. Naturally, the rumor got out in spite of these fraudulent precautions and it did the Ketchum firm, then already hopelessly if unconsciously insolvent, a deal of good, for the house that held much gold was surely a solid one—like the Ketchum firm of the stormy war days.

On the morning of August fourteenth came the break. The head of L. von Hoffman & Co., was in his office checking up the collateral while a friend looked on and gossiped. The broker turned over one of the gold checks and paused to make some remark, while the friend looked idly at the valuable slip of paper.

"Some more of young Ketchum's security," said the visitor. "He's speculating pretty high, eh?"

It was not a suspicious remark, not even an ill-intended one, but merely an empty comment.

The broker picked up the gold check and looked at it out of the merest curiosity. Suddenly he frowned.

"That's funny," he said. "Look at that signature."

This particular gold check apparently had been indorsed by the firm of Brockelman & Unger, a minor financial house, but well known in the Street.

Edward Ketchum, amateur money king and amateur forger, had made the mistake that had and has brought many a better scratcher and many a deeper

criminal to ruin—the flaw of carelessness. He had written the name Brockelman without an “r,” just as Albert T. Patrick had made out the telltale Rice check that betrayed him in the famous murder case without an “l” in his own first name, and just as the Bidwells had omitted the date from two of their Bank of England bills of exchange.

Broker von Hoffman was not suspicious. He had not the slightest reason for any lack of faith in Ketchum. Probably he had entirely too much reverence for the firm name. But he sent the gold check to Brockelman & Unger to have the signature corrected, and he discovered—forgery!

A few hours after the accidental finding of that one blundering signature, similar gold checks had been carried to the Bank of New York and the signatures of Registrar Bunder and Teller Ward likewise denounced. Young Ketchum, it was now certain, had been guilty of extensive frauds and crimes. He had backed his big speculations with forged gold checks against deposits of the yellow metal which had never been made.

The culprit himself was not to be found. Evidently he had received a warning as soon as the discovery was made, for he was at the Bank of New York before Von Hoffman and the Brockelman & Unger representatives could get there. He drew sixty thousand dollars in cash which he had on deposit, stuffed the bills into his pockets and walked up Broadway to a luggage shop, where he bought a bag. That was the last seen of him.

Wall Street was literally in a panic as further details became known. It was soon found that there were hundreds of these forged gold checks abroad and that a half dozen banks and large brokerage houses stood to lose heavily. What caused even a worse impression was the evidence of gross carelessness, of almost criminal looseness

of methods that kept cropping out. For instance, it was found that Ketchum had been careless to the point of slovenliness, not only in the Brockelman & Unger indorsement which first betrayed him, but in many others. He had repeatedly signed Paul Bunder's name as “Bunner.” Again, he had not really done any forgery in the artistic sense, for he had hardly taken the trouble to imitate the false signatures faithfully. In some instances he had just written out the names of the indorsers and the bank officers in his own natural handwriting, depending upon his reputation and the incredibly slothful business methods of the times to carry them through.

And, to make matters worse, it was a time of alarms and excitements. The war was over, but the country was still far from calmed. The loose financial and banking methods became a newspaper scandal, with the result that depositors thronged the streets of the district demanding their money. Banks closed and brokers suspended, to the accompaniment of the wildest rumors. It was a week before the public could be even reasonably reassured.

Oddly enough, the police proceeded in a leisurely and by no means efficient manner to seek the missing Ketchum. It took a few bitter broadsides in unfriendly newspapers to stir them to action.

Finally, on August twenty-sixth, Ketchum was found hiding in a private house in West Twentieth Street, whither he had gone immediately after his flight, to let the worst blow over, as he put it. He had represented himself there as C. R. Lowrie, of Ohio, and had gone to the trouble to write himself letters, which he managed to get posted from the West. They were signed “Father,” and he left them about so the landlady might see them and be disarmed of suspicion.

District Attorney A. Oakey Hall

procured eleven indictments for forgery and one for grand larceny against the heir of the house of Ketchum. Ketchum, after some bargaining, pleaded guilty and his counsel, ex-Judge Allen, argued to the court, in the person of Recorder John T. Hoffman, that Ketchum had been temporarily insane. Otherwise a young man, already rich and beyond any need, could never have done such things. Sentence was postponed from week to week, while Ketchum was being used as a witness in civil suits against his firm and others.

Finally Recorder Hoffman sentenced him to serve four and one half years in Sing Sing, explaining that he would have sent Ketchum away for five years; the maximum term, had it not been for the special statute which forbade sentences which would expire at such times as to cause prisoners in State prisons to be discharged in the winter months.

This curious statute, whose purpose is not hard to discern, was repealed not so many years ago. But it was in effect then, and Judge Hoffman consequently sentenced Ketchum to a term six months shorter than the limit of the law.

Ketchum's father now began a series of shrewd—to-day they would be called impudent—legal moves to save his son from Sing Sing. First, he asked for a pardon on the ground that his son had pleaded guilty and saved the State much money, it being certain that he should never have been convicted! That motion was denied, so old Ketchum hired other lawyers to begin a habeas corpus action. The case was proceeding well for the defendant, with the court ruling in his favor again and again, until spectators said cynically that money had been used and the forger's release purchased. But, at the blush of his coming triumph, young Ketchum interfered, stopped the proceedings with a dramatic speech, and said he was ready to serve his time.

He went to Sing Sing, was assigned to a congenial job, got a reduction of eight months for good conduct and was released toward the end of 1869. In a few weeks he was back in business, driving down to brokerage offices in a closed carriage, partly out of his ancient love of mysteriousness and partly, no doubt, to keep from being recognized and annoyed. His activities were more or less secret until June, 1870, when the brokerage firm of James Boyd & Co., exploded with a resonant bang. Boyd was thirty years old and this was his third failure and bankruptcy. It turned out that he had been acting as Ketchum's broker in a new gold-cornering operation that had burst.

Curiously, the newspapers were not violent and denunciatory. Some of them noted that Ketchum had been unfortunate before and been convicted. But the *Herald* came out with a frank two-column eulogy of the ex-convict, from which I glean this choice sentence:

This is a young man who may yet shake Wall Street as it was never shaken by Vanderbilt or Drew.

Alas, the prophesying writer was sorely mistaken. Ketchum next appears in print in 1873, when the firm of Ketchum & Belknap failed as a result of the great Jay Cooke collapse. Fifteen years later, under the name of Frederic B. Reed, Edward B. Ketchum was arrested for having defrauded Mrs. Louisa Saussy of twenty-three hundred dollars and committed to the Tombs in default of five thousand dollars bail. He was recognized by the clerk of the court and he got a mournful paragraph in the newspapers—he who had once inspired burning columns of praise and blame. Apparently, he had sunk to the level of the common cheat. And after that his once moody and overshadowing figure faded utterly out of the scene, and out of all memory but that of the delving criminographer.



FROSTY CRIMINALS

By Roland Krebs

Author of "It's All in the Driver," etc.

THE word "peculiar" was a perfect fit for Gottlieb Kreikenbaum. He tenaciously clung, for one thing, to the theory that in these days one still could make a success of a saloon, when every sensible person knows that all the saloon trade has gone to the drug store prescription counters and to close-mouthed persons who drive up to one's door in expensive sedans with packages under their arms.

Gottlieb's bar was at the end of town, surrounded by brick kilns and steel mills, at the terminus of the Forsythe Boulevard trolley line. In those rose-hued days before he sank to the ignominy of selling near beer, Gottlieb had prospered off the trade brought by the brick-yard and steel-mill workers. Every year he had been in the habit of turning in his automobile for a new model.

But now few, when any, persons patronized his isolated place, despite the toothsome, old-fashioned free lunch in

the corner, prepared by the skilled hands of Mrs. Kreikenbaum.

The bar towel was seldom ever moist now, and the bar flies often went hours at a time before they found a damp spot on the mahogany where they might slake their thirst.

Being held up was in itself no longer spaired not at all, for he was sure the day would come again when merry throngs would rally round the wassail bowl.

He was peculiar in other ways, too. One of his peculiarities was being held up. Gottlieb had been held up so often in his lonely saloon that he could, without boasting, call himself the surf of the crime wave.

Being a peculiar cuss, Gottlieb deso bad. What irritated Gottlieb Kreikenbaum and made him sneeze all winter long was that nearly all of the dozen or so robbers who had stuck him up had locked him in his big ice box. He felt that locking a man in an ice box when the thermometer outside the door regis-

tered nearly zero was hardly the sporting thing to do.

It had been a hard winter for Gottlieb. What time he had not spent as a prisoner in his ice box had been spent wrapped in blankets, with his feet in hot water, trying to rid himself of the colds he had caught in the big refrigerator.

"Papa, why don't you get Gus Schroeter, the carpenter, to fix it so you can unlock the ice box from the inside?" Mrs. Kreikenbaum had asked as she gave her husband his eleventh foot bath of the winter.

"I already asked him what he would charge me," Gottlieb replied irritably, "and that crook wants almost as much as it would cost me to buy a new ice box to saw through them big, thick doors and put inside locks on it. I won't spend another cent on that ice box. It's a big enough expense as it is. We never had so much trouble with the ice box in the old place down on Bremen Avenue. If we had a son, mama, we could send him through Harvard, Yale and Vassar for what I pay for ice to put in this ice box.

"I never seen ice melt so fast as it does in that refrigerator. You'd think I was putting it in the stove. One hundred pounds after the other I have Barney, the iceman, put in there."

Mrs. Kreikenbaum pursued another idea. "Then why don't you have a telephone put in the ice box?" she asked. "Then when some lump who holds you up locks you in there you call me up and I could come over and let you out before you catch pneumonia."

"I got enough bother with one telephone," her spouse protested stubbornly. "When the line ain't busy it's out of order. Besides, after I go to the expense of putting in a phone, the first time I'd try to call you up you'd probably be at some *kaffee klatsch* and I could freeze to death."

Mrs. Kreikenbaum was not discour-

aged. "Then you at least put a hook in the box," she said, "and hang inside your overcoat—that nice, thick overcoat that you had made in Hamburg nine years ago when you visited your brother there—and also your blue woolen muffler and the fur cap that comes down over the ears."

"All right, I do that," Gottlieb agreed.

"And while we're talking about ice boxes," Mrs. Kreikenbaum went on, "I want to ask you what do you intend——"

"Herr Satan!" sighed Gottlieb Kreikenbaum, rolling his eyes upward piteously. "Must I hear about that again?"

"Yes, you got to hear about it, and you're going to hear about it until I get a new ice box, Gottlieb Kreikenbaum," his wife shot back. "You think you got troubles with your ice box. You should have the trouble I got with the one right in my kitchen. You think yours don't keep the ice long. How about mine? It must be full of leaks and cracks. Twenty-six years I've had it. I can't keep nothing fresh in it. It's a fireless cooker, it really ain't a ice box.

"Only yesterday I had to throw out a half a pound of *suppen fleisch*—spoiled. Easy a third of my household money goes to buy ice with. I want a new one—a electric refrigerator like Mrs. Probst has got."

"Mama, I'm telling you we can't afford a new ice box, above all an electric one."

"So? I've had one ice box in twenty-six years. How many automobiles have we had in that time? Five."

"That was before prohibition. What kind of a automobile we got now? A nineteen-twenty-two model."

"Aw, you could retire right now. You don't have to keep your saloon. I tell you, Gottlieb, I got to have an electric refrigerator. Every lady in the Siegfried Society has an electric one but

me. They laugh at me behind my back, I bet."

Two evenings after this important conversation, Gottlieb Kreikenbaum was alone behind his bar, waiting for the remaining hour and a half before closing time to pass, when a tall man, covered with glistening snow and exhibiting an even more glistening revolver, entered the place.

"Gee whiz, another one," Gottlieb muttered, raising his hands aloft mechanically.

"Got much in the cash register, but-dy?" asked the bandit, getting right down to business.

"Of course not," his victim answered. "Ain't you ever heard about prohibition?"

The robber helped himself to thirty-five dollars in bills and silver in the cash drawer.

"Where's your safe?" he asked, looking about.

"I ain't got any," Mr. Kreikenbaum explained truthfully. "What use I got for a safe?"

"Yes, I guess you're right," the robber agreed. He walked over to where the old-fashioned free lunch was spread. "Pretty good grazing, Heinie," he commented impudently, helping himself to several cubes of brick cheese and a hot roast-beef sandwich. "What's this?" he asked, holding aloft a sort of pickle before eating it.

"*Senf Gurken*," Gottlieb said.

"I wouldn't be a bit surprised," the robber replied flippantly. "It's swell fodder though. Wish my old woman could muster a meal like this."

The bandit looked circumspectly about Gottlieb's saloon. He took several bits of stout cord from a pocket, but, when his eye alighted on the big, old-fashioned ice chest, he decided not to bother himself about tying Gottlieb hand and foot as at first he had intended.

"Get in the ice box, Fritz," he com-

manded, jerking his revolver for emphasis.

"*Gott sei dank*," Gottlieb murmured, "that mama thought of having me put an overcoat inside."

Obediently he marched into his prison, where, as soon as the holdup man had locked the doors and escaped, he clothed himself in his Hamburg overcoat, woolen muffler and fur cap with ear flaps.

It was close to midnight when Mrs. Kreikenbaum entered her husband's saloon, carrying in her hands a huge basket covered with a folded tablecloth.

"Papa! Oooo-hooo, papa!" she cried, when she noted his absence from behind the bar. "Where are you, daddy?"

Gottlieb, bundled up like a muzhik, rapped on the glass window of his prison for her and she released him.

"*Herr du meine Zeit!*" Mrs. Kreikenbaum ejaculated. "Again they held you up, what?"

"No, I just went in there to cool off from this winter weather," her husband retorted with nasty sarcasm.

"Ain't you glad, papa, that I thought about the overcoat?"

"Yeah, but you should also have thought about a chair. It gets tiresome standing up in there."

"On Monday you put that steamer chair we got in the basement in the ice box, you hear, papa?"

"Yes, and I think I also put in a couple of pipes and some tobacco and some Schiller and Goethe books to read, too. Also, maybe a radio."

Here Gottlieb concentrated his gaze upon a spot on the ceiling until the fixity of his position attracted Mrs. Kreikenbaum's attention.

"What's the matter, papa? You got a stiff neck?" she asked.

"No—a idea," he told her with a sly smile.

"You're fooling me."

"I ain't. I just happened to think,

mama. Nearly every time I been held up I been reading the *Staats-Zeitung* or playing me some solitaire right over here at this end of the bar. Every time the bandits have stood right in front of me—here.

"Do you remember that comedy we seen in the Bijou Dream movie last Wednesday, where the bricklayer dropped a sack of cement and it fell on a hodcarrier two stories below and knocked him cold? Well, that's what give me my idea.

"I'm going to hang a sack of old rusty nails and spikes and horseshoes and stove lids on a hook in the ceiling right over where these bandits been standing. When I got my hands up in the air I can't do nothing, like reach for a gun, say, without I get shot. But the robber can't see my feet, me being behind the bar, can he?"

"No. Well?"

"Well, I'll have a wire or something run to a pedal right there behind the bar where I usually been standing when I been held up and when the time comes I step on the pedal."

"Then what, papa?"

"Then it lets go of the sack on the ceiling and the sack falls on the robber and knocks him cold."

"If it don't make the gun go off in the bandit fellow's hand it's a swell idea," Mrs. Kreikenbaum conceded. "Now listen, papa, you see this basket?"

"Lunch for me?"

"No. It's some things I fixed for my Siegfried Society lunch Tuesday. If I leave it in the kitchen ice box—papa, I'm telling you, I got to have a new, electric refrigerator—it all spoils between now and Tuesday, to-morrow being Sunday. You keep it for me in your big ice box.

"Take good care of it, papa. I got a *hering salat* in there. It's got in it *Kalbsbraten*, *Kartoffeln*, *Gurken*, *Rotebeete*, *sauer Aepfel*, *hartgekochte Eier*, *Sellerieknolle*, *Zwiebln* und *gekochten*

Schinken. You know what work it is to chop all that up. Besides, I got also *Suelze* und *Hasenpfeffer mit Kloesse*."

Mrs. Kreikenbaum caught her husband rolling his eyes hungrily and licking his chops.

"Remember, papa," she cautioned severely, "no nibbling."

"Yes," Gottlieb retorted, outraged, "no nibbling. Your Siegfried Society dames get a *mords Frass* and what do I, your husband get? *Kartoffeln Pfannkuchen*!"

"All I got to say to you, Gottlieb Kreikenbaum, is no nibbling," Mrs. Kreikenbaum warned him once more.

It was only by exercising the greatest will power imaginable that Gottlieb, working all day Sunday on his sack of iron bandit floorer, was able to fight off the temptation to try just a taste of the toothsome herring salad and rabbit stew in his ice box. Perhaps it was his fear of his wife's wrath more than his will power that kept him right, for, while Mrs. Kreikenbaum's disposition usually was pacific, she struck real terror into her husband's heart when thoroughly aroused.

When his labors were done, he tried out his new contrivance. Just as if a bandit were holding a revolver to his head, Gottlieb stood behind his bar with his hands aloft. Then, with an immobile face, he stepped on the pedal which released the sack and a coal scuttle full of old iron came crashing to the floor with a thud.

"That'll fix the next one," Gottlieb said to himself with a sinister smile.

As he prepared to go, he paused with his key in the door lock and cast one more hungry, longing glance toward the ice box where rested the delicacies to be consumed on Tuesday by the Siegfried Society members who were to meet at Mrs. Kreikenbaum's house.

"I guess I better not," he told himself and went out and to his home.

"Did you nibble at my *Salat oder*

Hasenpfeffer?" Mrs. Kreikenbaum asked when he returned.

"I never even went near it, mama," he assured her.

"That's a good boy," his wife said.

On Monday Gottlieb had to trudge through a torrential rain to his place of business.

"I bet not a soul comes in all day," he told himself gloomily.

He was wrong. Late in the dismal afternoon his door opened and a huge man, dripping wet, entered. Friend or enemy? Friend!

"Gottlieb!" shouted the newcomer, beaming.

Mr. Kreikenbaum blinked unbelieving eyes. "Leopold Schmiedeecke!" he exclaimed joyously. "I thought you was living in Cincinnati five years."

"I am. I'm just here on a visit," explained the old friend.

Gottlieb came out from behind his bar and he and Leopold Schmiedeecke thumped each other on the back and went through the remainder of the routine behavior followed by old friends meeting after a long separation.

"Pssst!" whispered Gottlieb with a wink. "I got some pre-war schnapps hidden away back behind the bar. We try it out."

They tried it. A little later they tried it again. It got a third trial and a fourth. Soon they were singing "O Heidelberg."

"To-morrow night you come to my house for supper," the host said gaily. "You can't come to-night because mama is all day and evening by her sister's house."

"No, I can't come at all," the visitor announced sadly. "I got to catch me a nine o'clock train to-night for Cincinnati."

That provoked sorrow on both sides, which was promptly drowned in another potation.

"Gottlieb," said Leopold, edging toward the free lunch counter, "I got to

eat a little bite. I ain't had no lunch—nothing since breakfast."

The host stopped his friend with a grand gesture. "No," he said firmly. "You don't eat that. It ain't half good enough." He was considerably emboldened by the pre-war schnapps. "We eat a regular, old-time *Hering Salat und Hasenpfeffer*."

In Leopold Schmiedeecke's eyes sparkle and incredulity were mixed.

"Where you going to get them?" he asked skeptically.

"Out of the ice box," Gottlieb answered recklessly. "Mama's keeping them cold there. She made them for her Siegfried Society meeting to-morrow. She won't care, though, if we eat it. Mama can make more to-morrow morning, just as easy."

Leopold Schmiedeecke quibbled no more, for he was never to be found in the rear rank when there were herring salads and rabbit stews about.

Merrily they set about the feast and, when it was over, they had consumed entirely a spread that Mrs. Kreikenbaum had intended for six persons—and six very different persons.

"I got to streak it for the railroad station," Leopold said finally. He paused, saying, "I'm afraid maybe your wife won't like it that we ate her stuff."

"Mama will be glad," Gottlieb declared noisily and untruthfully, for Mrs. Kreikenbaum always had made no secret of her belief that Leopold Schmiedeecke was a bum and not the best of society for Mr. Kreikenbaum.

They parted with the usual feeling and once more Gottlieb was alone in his saloon, now dark and quiet save for the noise of the storm outside. Left to himself in the gloom, his aplomb forsook him entirely. He even trembled a little with fear of his wife's wrath when he contemplated the empty dishes.

Hours passed and Gottlieb blinked and considered many stories to tell Mrs.

Kreikenbaum, but none seemed convincing enough to get across.

"Oh, what am I going to do?" he moaned at ten o'clock as the immensity of his folly stood stark before him.

No answer came into the place, but a rain-soaked man—a slight, timid-looking cuss—did. He walked over to the spot where the bandits who had been holding up Gottlieb Kreikenbaum usually stood. He looked uncertainly at Mr. Kreikenbaum and then said, "Good evening."

"Good evening," Gottlieb answered pleasantly, bustling with his bar-towel as if he did a rushing business.

The stranger reached into his breast pocket and timidly produced a revolver, which he handled in an unprofessional manner, and quite as timidly said, "Throw up your hands, please."

Gottlieb complied obediently. "*Ach, was ist dies fuer ein Leben?*" he asked himself. "I ain't got trouble enough to-night. I got to get held up yet."

Then he remembered his sack-and-pedal contraption, of which the timorous robber suspected not. There was no smile on Mr. Kreikenbaum's face, but he was smiling all over inwardly as he stealthily put his foot on his pedal and stepped down.

The sack of old iron crashed down upon the bandit's head and he fell to the floor as if he had been hit by a coast-artillery projectile.

"That's the way to handle them smart alecks," Gottlieb cried jubilantly, coming out from behind his bar and picking up the revolver the highwayman had let fall when he himself fell.

After a time the knocked-cold intruder came to and dizzily rolled his eyes as he scrambled to his feet.

"Don't try no funny business," Gottlieb warned him, "or I'll shoot you with your own gun." Thereupon he launched into quite a speech, to which the holdup man listened helplessly and without comment.

"I'm getting sick of you fellers coming in here and putting me in the ice box," Gottlieb said. "It's got to stop. How many people have you put in ice boxes in your holdups? Shut up! Hundreds, I bet you. Probably half of them are dead now with pleurisy and pneumonia and bronchitis.

"Ah, ha! You ain't got any overcoat on. I teach you frosty criminals a lesson. You get in that ice box of mine and I'll keep you there a while. I let you freeze good for a while. Then I'll call the police. I'll learn you, you *luemmel!* Maybe after you see how it feels to be froze out your own self you'll think twice before you put any more people in ice boxes."

"I never——"

"Shut up! March!" Gottlieb commanded. At the ice chest door he paused. I guess," he said, "you think you're going to wear my nice warm overcoat, and fur hat over your ears. You're crazy. Hand them out. Now freeze good."

Gottlieb locked his captive in. Then he amused himself by humming snatches of song as he wiped glasses—just for practice, not because they needed it—or by peering occasionally through the thick panes of the ice-chest windows at his prisoner.

The captive, Gottlieb found, took his incarceration calmly. He sat patiently in the steamer chair that had been brought inside the chilly jail from the Kreikenbaum basement.

Twenty minutes passed.

"Aw, the poor feller! I guess it's almost enough now," Gottlieb said to himself, for he was a compassionate soul.

Once more he looked inside the ice chest to see what his prisoner was doing. The robber was examining the ice box's interior this time, having got up from his steamer chair for the purpose. He inspected the calking and joinery and, seemingly satisfied, seated

himself again. But this time on the floor, not in the chair.

"First I call the police," Mr. Kreikenbaum mused, taking the receiver from the telephone hook. He waited for the operator to ask him for a number, but he was rewarded only by a sputtering. Five minutes passed, during which Gottlieb jangled the hook to no good purpose.

"Just like as usual," he fussed, slamming the instrument back into place, "it's out of order from the storm."

Ten minutes passed and he tried again to obtain a connection with the police department. Several later attempts were as fruitless as the first.

"That feller's sure going to get a good freezing out," he mumbled.

From wondering how long it would be before he could call the police, Gottlieb's thoughts strayed back to his really central problem. His heart sank as he surveyed again the empty dishes on a side table.

"I-yi-yi, how mama'll take off my hide when she hears," he said miserably.

The gloom fled suddenly from his features and was replaced by a smile.

"Ah!" Gottlieb sighed, gleamy eyed, "I know I'd get a idea. That bandit fellow in the ice chest and me are in the same boat. We're both in trouble. Maybe I help him and maybe he can help me."

He went to the ice box and opened the door.

"Hey, you! Come out," he shouted and, when his prisoner appeared, added apologetically, "I can't get the police. The telephone's out of order."

"You don't expect me to sympathize with you, do you?" the captive asked.

"Well, not about that I don't, no."

The prisoner interrupted: "Say, before you go on, let me tell you something. It's none of my business, of course, but that ice box of yours is a frost. In fact, I doubt if it's as cold as a light frost. It's eating up ice and

wasting your money the way it stands now."

"Weren't you cold in there?" Gottlieb asked, disappointed. "And you without even no overcoat!"

"No, I wasn't. I couldn't buy a heavy benny this winter, me being broke and ail, but I did buy me a lot of heavy underwear. I've got on two suits."

"What's the matter with that there ice box of mine?"

"For one thing, I believe you've got it located right over the furnace that must be down in your basement. The wood is all warped from being wet and then dried with too much heat. Looks to me like you've been frying your ice right over the furnace."

Gottlieb's jaw fell. "Gee whillikins," he said. "Why didn't I ever think of that?"

"If you lay your hand on the floor in there you can feel the heat," the captive said. "I could move that ice chest for you."

Mr. Kreikenbaum suspected trickery. "How comes it you know so much about ice boxes?" he demanded.

"I'm a refrigerator salesman."

"You mean you ain't any bandit."

"Well, I was trying to be both, I guess. First I was a flop at the one job and then a bust at the other. You're the first person I've tried to hold up. I wouldn't have tried it if I hadn't tried to get nearly any kind of an honest job after I couldn't make the refrigerator business put me on my feet. You see," he said simply, with no trace of an inclination to make elaborate excuses for himself, "the refrigerating business doesn't exactly reach its peak in winter when people can put butter, eggs, milk and so on out on the window sill in the cold."

"Why, you poor feller," Gottlieb said, for he had a huge heart, a leviathan of a heart. "It would be a rotten shame to turn you over to the police."

"I agree with you."

"Listen," Gottlieb admonished, lowering the angle at which he held the revolver by way of being a bit more friendly. "Are you afraid of women?"

"Who isn't?"

"Yes, who? Are you afraid of my wife, do you think?"

"Probably."

"Yeah, but you ain't one tenth as afraid of her as I am."

Gottlieb Kreikenbaum explained his predicament anent the devoured her-ring salad and rabbit stew.

"Now, I put you back in the ice box. Pretty soon it's after midnight," he went on, "and when I don't show up at home, mama comes over to see what's keeping me. I tell her about the telephone being out of whack and I also tell her that you, being a hungry feller, ate up all the things she had in my ice chest."

Gottlieb smiled genially, as if expecting a compliment for his cleverness.

"Isn't that nice?" the refrigerator salesman-bandit amateur replied not letting himself be kidded into a smile. "I catch the devil and you get off."

"Ain't it better than me turning you over to the police?"

"Your wife'll probably be so mad she won't be content unless I get fifty years in jail. Not me."

Mr. Kreikenbaum took a twenty dollar bill from his pocket and stuffed it into his prisoner's hand. "Listen," he said owlshly, "maybe you do get the devil. But mama is big-hearted. When I tell her you ate it because you been starved, she'll want me to turn you loose. Sure, like I said, maybe you catch the devil, but you're here to-day and gone to-morrow. But me! I'll hear about this for the rest of my life."

"All right, I'll be the fall guy. It's getting to be a habit with me."

Dutifully he went back to his frozen cell.

At half past twelve in the morning

Mrs. Kreikenbaum put on her hat and a heavy coat, rubbers and mittens. Severity was written all over her face.

"I know what Gottlieb's done," she said, slamming the door after her. "He's been nibbling at my *Salat und Hasenpfeffer*, and he's afraid to come home. I'll learn him good. This is a new umbrella"—she brandished it—"but what do I care if he breaks it?"

She did not return her husband's guilty smile when she entered his place.

"Hello, mama," he said. "I been delayed because——"

"Because you been eating my things."

"I ain't either," the old liar said stoutly.

"It's all right then?" Mrs. Kreikenbaum now felt a shade of remorse.

Her husband gulped. He ducked his head. "No, it ain't exactly all right. Now, here's how it was, mama. This evening I was——"

His wife did not wait to hear. She started toward the ice chest with determination. Gottlieb grabbed her and held her back.

"Mama!" he shouted. "You keep away from the ice box. There's a robber in there."

"A bogy man I suppose," she answered sarcastically.

"No, it's honest a robber. He was holding me up when I knocked him out with my sack invention."

Mrs. Kreikenbaum became less impulsive. Her eyes grew round.

"I put him in the ice box, like them bandits always done me, for safe keeping while I tried to call the police," her spouse went on glibly. "The storm put the phone out of whack. While he was in there he ate up your *Hering Salat und Hasenpfeffer*—every speck."

A fierce fury swept over Mrs. Kreikenbaum. She shook her umbrella as if she were a Joan of Arc and it a lance.

"Bring him out here!" she com-

manded angrily. "March him out. I'll learn him a thing or two."

"Mama, listen," her husband implored, restraining her. "He's a poor feller. He ain't had nothing to eat for days. He ain't a regular holdup man, nohow. It's the first time he ever tried it. Aw, mama, think if we had an unfortunate son like him."

Where Gottlieb had a leviathan of a heart, his wife had a titan of a heart. In fact, it was so large it was as big as a Siamese Twins titan. Tears began to seep into her eyes.

"Let me see him, papa," she suggested.

The prisoner was led out of his stall once more. He had not exaggerated when he said he was afraid of women. He quaked as he saw Mrs. Kreikenbaum, still clutching her terrible umbrella.

"He's really saved me money, mama," Gottlieb went on. "He showed me what's wrong with my ice box. He's a refrigerator salesman, even if he ain't been able to sell any."

"What was wrong with it, papa?"

"It's right over the furnace. All the heat comes through the floor and melts the ice. That's why such big ice bills. He's going to move it for me."

Mrs. Kreikenbaum gave a start when she heard this explanation, but it was a start unseen by her husband.

"So you been starving?" she said sympathetically to the refrigerator salesman-bandit amateur.

"For days," he answered truthfully. "In fact, I'm still pretty hungry. Could I help myself to a little snack from the lunch counter?"

"No, you can't," Mrs. Kreikenbaum ruled decisively. "That's all stale by now. You come home with me and I give you a meal like you ain't had in weeks."

Gottlieb, congratulating himself on his cunning, locked up for the night. The three went to the Kreikenbaum

home near-by, where the lady of the house busied herself with a tremendous, thick steak, potatoes, onion slices, cauliflower and toast.

"Go right away to the cellar, papa," she ordered, "and get up a bottle of that dandelion wine Uncle Otto brought us."

Gottlieb, very well pleased with how both he and his victim were getting off, did as bidden. No more than he was out of earshot, his wife stopped her cookery abruptly.

"Say," she said to the guest of honor. "I just happened to think that the same thing that's wrong with my ice box is wrong with papa's."

"Or, I should say mine ain't got anything wrong with it, either. You see, I never used to open up the radiator slide in the furnace opening there in the wall, because the kitchen was always warm enough from the cooking stove. In the summer when I had the ice box put against the wall there—it's right up against the furnace opening—there wasn't any fire in the furnace and I never remembered it when winter came. Look at the ice chest and see if I ain't right."

The expert did so. "Sure," he agreed. "That's all that's wrong with it. Move it over into another corner and that ice chest is good for another five years. Of course, I wouldn't admit it if I was trying to talk you into buying an electric refrigerator."

"You don't have to talk me into it," Mrs. Kreikenbaum explained foxily. "It's papa you got to talk into it. I want an electric one, just like Mrs. Probst's. Now when he comes up with the wine, I want you should tell him that ice box is all shot—cracked and leaky—and say I really should have a new one, a modern one, which'll save us all kinds of money in ice bills."

"Or else," Mrs. Kreikenbaum added menacingly.

"Or else what?" he asked.

"Or else, that's all," Mrs. Kreikenbaum said severely.

All unsuspecting, Gottlieb returned.

"Do you know," the salesman-bandit told him after a discreet passage of time, "that some day you're liable to die of ptomaine poisoning?"

"No," the amazed host responded. "Why?"

"I've just been looking at your wife's ice box. It's all shot. Food'll spoil in there some day and poison you. You ought to have a new one—an electric refrigerator."

"No!" Gottlieb thundered, his old stubbornness of years' standing returning.

"Herring salad," the salesman whispered to him in an aside.

"You crook," Gottlieb whispered back in another aside. Then, more loudly, he said as if it were after reflection, "I don't know but what you're right."

"It's not as expensive as you think." the refrigerator man told them, draw-

ing contract blanks—often more deadly than a gun—from his pocket. "Ten dollars down and two fifty a week. Just sign here on the dotted line."

Five minutes later the deal was made. "Guess I better be going," the ex-bandit-salesman said, showing he was a smart man. Success in business depends largely upon knowing when to get out—to get out from under or to get out from on top, but above all to get out.

At the door, with Mrs. Kreikenbaum busy back in her kitchen, Gottlieb shook hands. "Good-by," he said and added good-naturedly, "You told me you were a flop as a crook. You're a success. You're a crook."

"So are you," the departing guest returned. He was about to say, "And so is your old woman," but he didn't.

"And yet," Gottlieb continued, "you're a pretty good sport."

"So are you," the crook sport agreed. This time he did add, "And so's your old woman."

POLICE HOLD MILLIONS IN LOOT

THE value of property held by the police of New York in loot recovered from lawbreakers was recently estimated to be in the neighborhood of eight million dollars. Of this amount, five million dollars' worth is liquor that is being held as evidence against defendants charged with violating the prohibition law. Then there are about forty thousand dollars' worth of firearms which were confiscated when their owners were denied renewal of their pistol licenses. These weapons must be held for one year before they can be destroyed.

Every year, an auction sale of the property held by the police in this way is held, and articles are knocked down to the highest bidder. Some great bargains are to be had at these auctions, as valuable jewelry is often included. Among the items scheduled to be disposed of in the last sale, held in November, was a string of pearls said to be worth several thousand dollars. This string was taken to a station house by a taxicab driver who stated that it had been left in his cab. No one claimed the pearls, and the taxi driver could not be found after the lapse of six months. Another item was a collection of \$1,481.07 in nickels and pennies found under the bed of a beggar woman who was subsequently taken to the Central Islip Hospital for the Insane. It was this woman's habit to convert all her money into nickels and pennies and keep her surplus under her bed. Other sums of money dropped by thieves are also included in the loot guarded by the police. There are securities, too, worth in the neighborhood of one and a half million dollars, and automobiles valued at half a million.



POLISH

By Donald Van Riper

Author of "The Last Jest," etc.



YOU are a bit rough. Crude, I might say."

"Huh," grunted "Biff" Bannon. "I'd rather be rough than like you. Why, say, 'Hub,' alongside of you plate glass'd look like plowed ground. They is such a thing as being too smooth."

"You have nothing to fear on that score," cut in Hub Barker. "That is the trouble with you. You deteriorate steadily. No ambition to better yourself. You dress like a burglar, look like a burglar, talk like one, act like one and——"

"What about it?" demanded Biff. "I ain't able to see where being a fashion plate and talking with a Harvard brogue gets you anywhere."

Hub Barker flushed red with swift indignation. He glared at Biff. They were squatted on the grass in the perfect privacy of the otherwise deserted baseball field in the park. The openness of the place allowed even more freedom of discussion than the back room of any of their usual haunts.

Nevertheless, Hub shot a swift glance roundabout before he answered.

"Brogue," he said, "is the wrong word. You scarcely employ the correct word at any time. I am no paragon of perfect speech, but recently your vulgarisms and mistakes have grated on me."

Biff Bannon threw back his head and laughed, a performance that was derisive rather than mirthful. "Ha! Ha! Ha!" He paused and stared directly at Hub. "Ha! I suppose you think I'm just crazy to hear that high-hat lingo of yours. When we joined up you was plenty bad enough, but nowadays the fancy words fall off your lips faster than hairs off a shedding dog.

"Keep it up and they'll be calling you 'Gentleman Joe' the next thing you know, and that's as bad a jinx to a guy in the house-cracking trade as meeting a black cat on Friday the thirteenth. Outside the movies all the gentlemen cracksmen I ever heard tell of wound up in the pen just about twice as easy and often as the ordinary, hard-boiled,

old-fashioned, garden variety of burglar."

Hub regarded Biff with a growing hardness of manner. Biff Bannon was perpetually in need of a shave; his tie always seemed to sag. Indeed, from the dull, run-over shoes to the draggled felt hat, Biff Bannon was the antithesis of his partner in appearance. Under the stubble of beard Biff's jaw was hard angled and outthrust. His nose had a hint of aggressive fighting qualities in the snub of the tip. As usual there was a wisp of hair trailing down from beneath his hat and accenting the squint of his eyes. Altogether Biff made a picture calculated to inspire disgust in the immaculate Hub Barker.

"There's no need to look like a tramp," pronounced Hub. "There is no disgrace in a bit of pride in one's personal appearance."

"Who in blazes is *one*?" sneered Biff. "Your talk's mixed up plenty without bringing in arithmetic."

Hub ignored the invitation to quibble and went right at the business he had considered so long and which he now knew had come to an issue. "You are hopeless," he said. "I have ambition for bigger things. I had hoped that my example would finally cause some improvement in your manners and appearance."

"Improvement!" Biff's jaw worked hard so that tiny knots formed beneath the beard-shaded flesh. "If you're an improvement I'm glad I'm a second-hand oil can. My manners with a jimmy or a tough safe are as good as yours any day in the week. In our line appearances don't count. The less folks see of me the better I like it."

"That is your final stand?" quizzed Hub.

"I'll tell the world it is," answered Biff. "If I gotta have a tenpenny lecture every few minutes I quit."

Hub gulped. The thing he had been trying to screw up courage to say had

fallen so easily from Biff's lips that he felt an unexpected resentment marring his pleasure at the ending of their partnership.

"And that ain't all," burst out Biff after a moment's pause. "I give you fair warning that the jobs we have spotted out goes to the guy that gets there first. I know blame well you've been itching to ditch me for a long time. Well, go to it. Only, I'm still in business, and I'm not going to split nothing."

Hub gulped again. Biff had risen to his feet now, another lock of hair had descended from beneath his hat, his jaw had assumed a more belligerent position than Hub would have believed possible. For several days Biff had shown an admirable restraint under Hub's barbed remarks, but now that the break had come he seemed intent on making up for lost time.

"Got sense enough to stay sot," he roared. "If you was to stand up now I'd paint some shadows around those penciled eyes of yours that'd make you look like the latter end of a misspent life. Get up you big stiff! Get up!"

Naturally Hub did not get up. Biff's language was slipping into the gutter stage, and Hub had no desire to clash with the savage being that anger had developed from his usually easy-going partner.

Biff snarled. There is no other word for the horrible sound that came when language failed him. He turned and went hurriedly away. As he stamped along his great hands opened and shut with a violence that caused a curious little shiver to run up and down Hub's spine.

Any lingering doubt that Hub might have entertained as to Biff's attitude was dispelled upon his return to his room that night. A note had been slid beneath the door. Hub knew the writing. Unsigned though it was, there was

no mistaking the careless, scrawling hand:

You better lay off'n those there jobs complete. It ain't goin' to be healthy for you if we meet.

Hub scowled at the note. This afternoon's affair had been a severance of diplomatic relations. This was a declaration of war. It was small wonder that Hub scowled. The several jobs that they had outlined were worth while. From the harsh and unequivocal nature of the note it was evident that if he was to share in any of that loot he would have to take chances with Biff as well as with the law.

Hub proceeded to shave, a process he performed with such meticulous care as to make it almost a rite. Hub had long since discovered that he thought best while engaged in the gentle art of "dolling up" as Biff Bannon called his present operations. To-night he made slow progress as he mentally groped for his best course of action. Biff was a tough man, and the same qualities that made him a great partner when the going was rough now made him a dangerous foe.

The extent of Hub's beauty operations would have caused Biff to blink with amazement. Biff, of course, knew about the shaving lotion and the smell-producing talcum, but the sight of Hub plying lip stick and rouge would have astonished him beyond words. Only when the last hair had been slicked into place and set beneath a layer of shiny, creamy grease did Hub reach a decision.

He would avoid a clash with Biff, but he would at least pull one of those jobs for himself. Convincing logic pointed the way to Hub. He knew that Biff would, in the hot hold of anger, rush off and try to pull all of those jobs at once. Also he knew that Biff would do the easy tricks first, even though in this case the hard job happened to be the richest of the four they had mapped out.

On this particular job Hub had been holding out a vital bit of information. In this one instance he had anticipated the possibility of a break and now he rejoiced that he had done so. The information that he had and that Biff lacked was the combination that would open the safe in the home of the Harvey Sterlings. Biff Bannon would perforce have to blow the safe if he wanted to get inside.

The Harvey Sterlings were the richest people in Topwood. What they considered small stuff in the jewelry line and what they termed emergency cash would total fully three thousand dollars. The same disgruntled and dishonest butler who had sold Hub Barker the combination to that safe had obligingly listed the average contents of the Sterling strong box.

The beauty of this layout was that the stuff was there even when the Sterling city house was closed. Of course the real bulk of the Harvey Sterling jewelry was safe in the bank vaults downtown, but Hub regarded a prospective loot of three thousand as a high spot in his career.

So Hub was in fairly good humor, smug with self-satisfaction, as he strolled forth for his night's work. He saw now that the Sterling job could well serve to kill two birds with one stone. After he had removed the loot he would plant a little surprise for Biff Bannon.

He well knew that Biff would fight in fair fashion and that the last thing his former partner would do would be to help the police, but on his own part he had no such scruples. In fact, looking at the whole affair in a hard-headed way, he believed that the quicker he landed Biff in the toils of the law the better he would feel.

Before heading toward the suburbs Hub made a visit to the Italian section of town. His destination was a little shop in the heart of the section. Here

was the place of Frank Vigorno. Over the door was a sign.

FRANK VIGNORNO

**Hops and Malts,
Bottles, Supplies, Papers, Cigars,
Fireworks, Etc.**

For all the diminutive size of his place of business this Vigorno was a power here, a thorn in the ribs of the police, at once a popular boss and a sinister, uncaught lawbreaker. Vigorno's real bootleg activities were conducted from another point. The rest of the sign seemed innocuous enough especially when one understood that feast days called for fireworks.

That word "fireworks" was not as innocent as a casual passer-by might have thought. Hub was one of the favored few who knew that Vigorno's fireworks factory out on the meadows had produced more than one bomb that had not called forth admiring "Ah's" and "Oh's." Here, on occasion, Hub had purchased the soup needed to blow a safe. However, to-night he wanted something different from anything he had heretofore obtained from Vigorno. That final "etc." included much else.

Vigorno sat alone far back in the dimly lighted shop. He reminded Hub Barker of an old gray spider. Hub, however, did not trust to appearances.

"Good evening, Frank. Are you alone?"

Vigorno nodded while an appreciative smile disclosed his gold-capped teeth. "It is well that you are careful," he answered. "I am alone. Just waiting."

"I want something new. I desire"—Hub stepped close and his voice lowered—"a new sort of bomb. I want a lot of noise and very little damage."

"Ah," chuckled Vigorno. "A celebration. That sort of bomb is not new. No slugs, eh? No damage, eh?"

"Simply a noisy bomb," explained Hub. "The new part is that I want a trick fuse."

"Slow? Fast?"

"What I wish," said Hub, "is a fuse that will start with a blow. I want it fixed so that a slight blow will start it, and then I want the fuse to be fast."

"Fast?" echoed Vigorno. His lined face wrinkled in mirth. "*Phist! Boom!*"

"Can you do it?"

Vigorno nodded. "I have just such a bomb. Left from the last festival. Much noise. Little harm. I have the fast fuse. Faster than two devils. And I can find a detonating cap that will go with a slight, such a little blow."

A few minutes later Hub Barker emerged from Vigorno's shop. Under his arm he carried an innocent-looking, paper-wrapped package. It contained the bomb and the fuse. In his vest pocket was the cap that would supply the fire necessary to ignite the fuse. He moved with due caution through the crowds. He had no desire to be the victim of his own carelessness. As Vigorno had pointed out, there was no telling just how harmless such a bomb would be.

He made his way without mishap far across the town. The home of the Harvey Sterlings stood aloof from even its aristocratic neighbors. The Sterling property comprised one entire block. The house appeared to Hub as a gigantic black shadow in the masses of shrubbery.

It was from that shrubbery that he watched Jim Flannery, officer on this beat, slowly march on toward the next block. Hub knew from past observation that he would now have fully half an hour for the work at hand before Flannery would again pass this way. For a man of Hub's talents that half hour would be ample.

Two minutes of manipulation with his keys gained him entrance. Once away from the front hall he employed his flash freely. The windows were shuttered so that the use of a flash in-

volved no risk. Once in the library, where the safe stood, he gingerly placed his package on the table.

The dial went smoothly under his skilled touch. Ten to the right. Eleven to the left. Six to the right again. Then one breathless moment as he touched the handle. Suppose that butler had lied to him?

The door moved easily beneath his hand. Now a bit of work with the keys at the compartment doors, and he would be three grand to the good.

The flash that he had placed on the table in back of him disclosed even better loot than he had expected. The first compartment yielded a glittering heap of jewels that he swept hungrily into his pockets. Once he had ripped those stones free they would net him real money through the fences. The stones were of good size, easily marketable. Out of the second compartment he fished a man's solitaire. It was a big stone, a gleaming, tempting bit of wealth. The third box held what the butler had said the Sterlings considered emergency cash.

With fingers quivering with surprise he counted over the sheaf of golden notes. He gasped as he finished the count. Twelve hundred dollars. This was a haul! Not quite the sort of emergency that the Sterlings would anticipate.

He smiled at the thought. He was thoroughly pleased with himself. He would just as soon be a gentleman cracksman if he could always fare this way. As for Biff Bannon with his coarse, crude methods he would now set the stage that would show that worthy just how smooth Hub Barker could work.

He closed the safe again, spinning the dial with the vim of a conqueror. There remained only the arranging of the surprise before his departure.

He placed the bomb first in the corner not three feet from the safe. The

fuse he ran along the baseboard to the shadows of a chair. Next he stepped over to the table and picked up a flat bronze paper weight.

He now balanced the weight carefully with a match as a prop beneath the raised end while the other end held firm against the deep pile of the rug on the floor. Having figured out the precise location of the weight he ran a thread from one of the wheels beneath the safe and fastened the other end to the match that was to serve as the support for the bronze paper weight.

Next he placed a half dollar at the exact point where the falling weight would strike. On the silver coin he placed the fuse. Once more he raised one edge of the bronze weight and placed the match as a support. This time, however, he had the thread attached to the match so that the slightest movement of the safe would cause the metal slab to drop against the silver coin. All that remained now was to attach the cap to the fuse just as Vigorno had instructed him and then to rest the cap on the half dollar.

This done he stepped very gingerly away and prepared to depart. Biff Bannon was due for a big surprise when he came to visit the deserted home of the Harvey Sterlings. If he moved the safe to wrap it against the noise of the exploded soup, he would cause the thread to move. It was something like a nursery rhyme. The thread would move, the match would fall, the weight would drop, the cap would fire—between the weight and the coin—the fuse would burn, and the bomb would go off.

If Biff did not move the safe first the jolt of the blasting soup would cause the same events to take place. If Biff resorted to prying with a can opener there would still be the same result. Hub Barker grinned. It was not the sort of warfare that Biff would put up but it was of the kind that suited Hub. That bomb would bring the

neighborhood out and give Biff plenty of trouble.

Meanwhile he would be at a safe distance with his loot.

Hub looked at his watch beneath the light of the flash. He had taken longer than he thought. Twenty-five minutes had elapsed since he had entered. That measuring and careful setting of his trap had used up more time than the robbery itself. Still he had five minutes margin at least before Officer Flannery would again tramp along the block.

He left the room on tiptoe, fearful now of his own careful adjustment. It would be a grim joke on himself if he should stumble and set that bomb off.

In the hall once more he moved briskly toward the door. Five minutes for his get-away and he was making off with the biggest haul of his life.

He eased the big front door open slowly. He peered out through the inky blackness of the vestibule toward the faint light of the street lamp creeping through the thick-set shrubbery.

Hub Barker did not step out as he intended. From the darkness of the vestibule something commanding shoved into his ribs. Hub could not mistake the feel of an automatic, nor did he mistake the identity and intent of the man who spoke. It was Biff!

"Shove up your mitts!"

Hub obeyed. In this situation he was as helpless as a man with his head in a bag. Besides he carried no gat of his own. He had always depended on Biff Bannon for the rough stuff.

"Turn around and beat it inside!"

Reluctantly Hub obeyed. All the headwork in the world is weak against the persuasion of a snub-nosed gun.

Yet as he stepped inside under the prodding guidance of Biff's automatic, he realized that he must think and think fast. In his pockets was the biggest haul he had ever made, and if his wits failed him he would lose it.

Biff's flash went on now and he spoke

decisively. "Shell over, Hub. I thought I'd follow you, let you take the chances, and then collect."

"Put away that flash you fool," snarled Hub. "There are glass panels in that front door."

"Move on then," urged Biff. "Straight ahead through that door."

Hub moved reluctantly. He was back in the library once more. He made a swift decision. He must lie out of this.

"Please put the gun away," he said. "You're just the man I wanted to get for help."

Biff grunted and kept the light steadily on Hub. "Ain't it funny? This afternoon you and me was through, and now you need me to help. Say, Hub, I wouldn't put this gat away on a bet. Shell over."

"Do not be ridiculous," said Hub. "If you'll look at the safe you'll see it hasn't been touched. It looked too tough for me to tackle alone. I was going out to make a deal with you to work just this one job fifty-fifty."

Biff laughed. "Say, Hub, if that safe is untouched I'll do the job myself."

"It is untouched," asserted Hub.

"Take out your flash," directed Biff. "Sit it on the table and point it at the safe. And remember I've still got this rod pointing your way. And I'd just as leave punctuate that grammatical frame of yours as not."

Hub placed his flash as ordered. "You see, I told you I had not touched it."

There was the sound of the surprised intake of Biff's breath. "Well, I'll be jiggered if I can see what you was doin' in here for half an hour! I followed you and when you come breezing out I figured all I had to do was collect." Biff's tone was positively aggrieved. "Me wasting me time like that. What was you up to?"

"Well," drawled Hub. "When I perceived the toughness of the safe I decided to scout through the rest of the

house. And I did. And all I had for my trouble was the exercise."

Hub's words, his tone were all calculated to throw Biff off guard. Biff snorted. "The devil take the big house part of it. It's the last trip you better make here. I'll blow that safe, but I don't need none of your help—see!"

"All right," said Hub. "If that is your attitude I will go."

"After I search you," growled Biff. "If you did snitch any trinkets upstairs I'll take them off your conscience."

Biff's light moved nearer. Hub sought to control his expression. He spoke lightly. "All right, search me."

"That's just what I'm going to——"

Biff went no further with the statement of his intentions for Hub had made a wild break to escape. With one swooping motion he swept Biff's flash from that startled individual's grasp and sent his own spinning from the table. He dove to the floor, but almost instantly he felt Biff's superior bulk descending. He tried to wriggle free, but above him Biff grunted as he strove to maintain his advantage. Biff's fist crashed into Hub's ribs so that his breath left him with explosive force. Another lurch and another blow.

In that one brief instant of silence he heard the click of metal against metal. Then the snap of the cap followed by the hiss of the fuse. Something impelled with all the wrath at Biff's command swished past his head. Then the whole house seemed to shake.

Biff Bannon did not wait to pick himself up. He scrambled as best he could and clawed up a flash light. Still on all fours he reached the door into the hall. There he staggered upright, gave one terrified backward glance at the eerie light of the other fallen flash piercing the dense smoke, and lurched on toward the front door.

Once outside he ran blindly through the yards. His one thought was to get away. Only after he had covered many

blocks did he remember that there were other dangers to be considered. He could not explain the explosion. His heel flying over had hit something metallic.

As he fell into a more sedate pace he realized that his face hurt terribly. The place for him was home in the rooming house.

He swung around his home corner and bumped squarely into the arms of a policeman.

"What's the idea?" roared the bluecoat. "Gun in one hand, flash light in the other."

Biff gulped. "I ain't done nothing."

"Sure," said the policeman. "You look like you been smelling a buzz saw."

"I ain't done nothing."

His captor had taken away the gun. "No, but you might."

"I ain't——"

"Your language is bad. Don't you know that you shouldn't say 'ain't'?"

Biff silently accompanied his captor to headquarters. He had had quite enough of proper grammar for one day.

Although he knew that he was destined for a trip up the river, Biff derived a lot of laughter out of one line in the next morning's paper. The policeman who had brought him his breakfast gazed at him in astonishment as he howled with mirth.

"What's the joke, Bannon?"

"Joke?" wheezed Biff. "Joke enough! This stuff you fellows fed the reporters. Gentleman Joe Barker—that's rich. And listen to this! 'One of the smoothest workers in the country'. Say, that's a laugh. Here was Barker trying to frame me and he frames himself. Gentleman Joe!"

"You've got a queer sense of humor," growled the man outside. "What's so funny about that?"

"Well," sighed Biff, "if he's a gentleman, my name is Buster Brown. And if that was a smooth piece of work, I'd hate to be in on a rough one."



KEEP YOUR WITS!

By John Baer

Author of "What He Swallowed," etc.

CRIMINALS are sometimes caught by extremely clever detective work; sometimes criminals convict themselves through sheer stupidity. And in other cases, a set of entirely unexpected circumstances and coincidences combine to enmesh the criminal in the net of the law. This combination of accidents is generally called "fate," the criminal himself is apt to term it dumb luck.

In the case of the murder of Raymond Peat, detectives played a minor part. Nor was the case marked by the criminal's lack of intelligence. In the end, fate did overcome him. But it was no casual fate; it was an ironical fate, which had to turn for assistance to the nimble wit of the criminal himself.

At a few minutes past ten o'clock of an early September night, a young man dressed in a dark-gray suit, entered a three-story house in the Village section of New York. There was nothing of the prowler in his manner; he walked up the hall stairs at a natural gait and

with no concern for the creaking of loose boards. And yet, his mission was no lawful one; there were about "ten grand in stones" in the house, and this young man meant to get them.

He was a quick-witted man, this Hy Kolmer, and he took no end of pride in the fact. This job was just a bit out of his line, but he had done similar ones previously.

And of course, ten grand in stones is a lot of wood, and even a good saxophone player might condescend to tap the drums for one number if he were promised such a stipend as a recompense for going out of his specialty. And to further console Kolmer, if indeed he needed consolation, was his awareness that after all, this job had depended mainly on his wit.

"What I say is that it's all right to sock a guy on the dome or to crack a crib if you can't think of a better way of getting the dough," he had often said. "But if a fellow is smart and can keep his wits about him, he don't have to be rough. It takes more than

eyes to see easy change; it takes brains. And you can't sit around and wait for chances either; you've got to make the breaks yourself."

Kolmer was in a "rooming" house. Originally there had been a "flat" on each of the three floors, but an artist had gained possession of the building and had it remodeled according to his own somewhat eccentric ideas. Walls had been knocked down, and other walls set up; the dumb-waiter opening had been widened, and a self-running elevator built into it—a device that was often out of order.

But the artist had tired suddenly of the place and had leased it at a reasonable figure to Carl Marquard, who had transformed it again into a boarding house. Marquard catered to what he called the sporting element; his house was generally well filled during the fall and winter months. But at the time he had only five guests, including Kolmer.

Of the other four, Kolmer took an active interest in only Raymond Peat. The interest of Kolmer never failed to be attracted by money, and Mr. Peat was reputed to be worth a quarter million dollars. Peat, a short, stocky man of forty-odd, had acquired his fortune only recently, due to the sudden and spectacular ballooning of his real-estate holdings. He was a man of modest wants and did not allow his good luck to turn his head or to effect any profound changes in his habits.

The more a man is worth, the less he frequently carries on his person—in cash, that is—especially if he is a quiet, unostentatious man such as Mr. Peat, who was entirely without "flash" or "shine." There was none of Peat's coin about to pilfer, but there was something else—jewelry.

The pieces, a round dozen in number, came into Peat's possession while he was staying at Marquard's. An uncle—a wealthy shipbuilder—died, and made Peat heir to certain pieces in his jew-

elry chest. Peat's share consisted of rings, watch fobs and charms and scarf pins. Some of the pieces were valuable not only because of the stones, but also because of their unique designs and the wonderful craftsmanship employed in making the settings. Peat was very proud of the collection and displayed it to the other house guests both at the dining table and in his room.

On one occasion when Peat was examining a scarf pin, Kolmer dropped into his room, and, after discussing the beauty of the piece for a while, Peat replaced it in a small box, which he locked in his trunk. This happened on a Tuesday evening, and, on the following morning when Peat was under the shower in the bathroom, Kolmer was taking a wax impression of the trunk key. This was the sort of thing which Kolmer called "making the breaks" instead of waiting for them. On the same morning, Kolmer also discovered that one of his own keys fitted the lock to the door of Peat's room—the sort of a lock, incidentally, which any good burglar could have opened with a hairpin.

But even with the keys to the door and trunk, Kolmer did not rush into action. The brainy man, he believed, should never be in a hurry. He should strike at the precisely correct moment, or not at all.

He did not have to be patient long. Ten days after Kolmer had the keys, Peat announced that he was leaving New York. He intended to take the jewels with him.

"I had them to several jewelers today and I would have sold them at a right price," Peat said one evening at the dinner table. "But the best offer I had was for seventeen thousand dollars, and they must be worth twice that much. These fellows think I'm a rube."

"And what are you going to do with them now?" asked Marquard.

"Give them away," returned Peat. "What else would a bull-necked codger

like me do with those pretty things? I could wear that one fob maybe, but all the other things would look as conspicuously funny on me as cowbells would on humming birds. I'm a bachelor with no immediate family, but in California I have friends and cousins—mighty good fellows some of them. This jewelry will make fine gifts."

Casual questioning on Kolmer's part, revealed that Peat purposed leaving New York one week later, his ultimate destination being San Francisco. But he wasn't going there directly; his program called for wayside trips and stops at Cleveland, Altoona and Waynesville. Two days before Peat was due to start, Kolmer learned one other fact, a highly important one. Peat was not going to travel with his trunk: he had arranged to have his trunk sent to a freight station in San Francisco where it would have to lie until he got there himself, ten days or so later. Peat's home had no one in it to receive shipments.

And then, on the afternoon of the day preceding that of the intended trip, Peat and Marquard had a talk in the second-floor hall, where Marquard was tacking down a new carpet. Kolmer, standing just to the side of the third floor landing, overheard parts of the conversation.

"So you think I ought to leave the jewelry in the trunk and ship it that way?" asked Peat.

"Sure, why not?" came Marquard's prompt response. "Who do you imagine would steal that old battered rigamajig anyway. Don't jewelry salesmen carry their stuff that way all the time—sometimes more than fifty thousand dollars' worth at a clip?"

"If I took them with me, I'd have to keep them on my person or in my suit case——"

"And how would that be safer than the trunk? Isn't there at least one man held up or one suit case filched for every trunk which is swiped?"

"I guess that's right," admitted Peat. And then, after a pause: "I have them in the trunk now, and the trunk is already roped for shipping. Guess I'll leave 'em where they are. Besides, they're insured. Naturally, I wouldn't like to lose them."

Kolmer slipped back into his own room, where he came to a quick decision. He would steal Peat's treasure that night. He had almost come to believe that he would be cheated of his chance; too great an element of risk had always been present. But now the situation was exactly to his liking.

Kolmer knew that Peat was going to the theater that night with a New York real-estate man; he had heard Peat mention that the tickets for the show had already been bought. The Marquards, too, were going out—to the regular Thursday-night session of a bridge and whist club. As has been mentioned, there were three other roomers, all of them men-about-town—Kolmer called them "night hawks," and all three of them were likely to be absent until midnight.

That evening, after dinner, Kolmer went into Peat's room to bid the Californian good-by. Peat, always trusting and confiding, peered at him through thick-lensed glasses and said, among other things:

"Yes, in a way I'll be sorry to go. This is a nice town, and I've met a lot of fine fellows here. My train leaves a few minutes past four in the morning. Mrs. Marquard offered to get up and make breakfast for me, but I wouldn't hear of it. I can eat at the train depot. They'll be getting my trunk to-morrow some time. Well, so long, Hy. Glad I met you, and if you ever go to Frisco——"

And now, as Kolmer climbed the stairs in the dark Marquard hall, he asked himself again if anything could be sweeter? None of the second-floor occupants was in; he could tell that at

a glance. It was inconceivable that these night owls be in bed at a few minutes past ten; and if they were at home, lights glimmering through their transoms would betray that fact. And there were no lights.

Peat was at the theater; when he got in he would undoubtedly retire at once so as to get a little sleep before starting on his trip. His trunk was already roped; the chances were a million to one that he would not open that trunk again until he caught up with it several weeks later in San Francisco.

Several weeks later! The jewels would be disposed of several weeks before their theft was even discovered! And if Peat had been offered seventeen thousand for them, he would be able to collect ten grand, if not more. Ten grand to be had for the picking up! Was it clever of him to have prepared for this chance? He'd say it was!

On the third-floor landing, Kolmer snapped on his pocket flash. The door to Peat's room was but a few feet from the top step. Kolmer tried the door and found it locked. He drew out his bunch of keys. A moment later, he was pulling the door quietly toward him; all doors in the Marquard house opened outward.

He stepped into the room, playing his light on the floor ahead of him. He turned to his left and slowly raised the light to the bed. And then he stepped suddenly back, but too late.

He heard a hissing sound, caused by the sharp intake of a breath, and then a body hurtled against him, almost throwing him to the floor. But he rebounded from the wall, and, in the frenzy of his fright, he struck out furiously with his flash light.

It crashed heavily with a sickening sound against something hard, and the next thing of which Kolmer was clearly aware was a feeble groan. Sometimes it takes only a slight jar to put one of these flashes out of commission; some-

times a hammer blow will do no more than dent it. There was still a light in Kolmer's flash, and he played it on the floor again.

A body lay huddled against the bed; Peat's body. There was an ugly bruise on Peat's left temple. As soon as Kolmer had steadied himself, he bent down over his attacker. After a moment, Kolmer rose and sat on the bed. When several minutes had passed, he bent over the body again. He could detect no sign of life. The blow on the temple might have done it; or perhaps it was the gash in the back of Peat's head which had struck the edge of the iron bed rail.

Kolmer had come to steal, and he had killed. The shock left him dazed and rendered him incapable of any immediate action which required energy. He sunk on the bed again and lighted a cigarette.

And presently he found himself mumbling, "*Think* yourself out of it; you've got to think yourself out of it! Only brains will get you out of this mess. Keep your wits about you!"

He put his flash on the bed, training its light on Peat's trunk. He untied the ropes and opened the lock. Then he emptied the entire contents on the floor.

Mr. Peat was stockily built, but he was a short man; and it was a large trunk. Kolmer managed to get the greater part of the clothing back into the trunk, even after it held the body.

What remained of Peat's belongings, Kolmer carried into his own room and crammed into his own suit case. Among these articles was the box in which Peat kept his jewels. But his work was not yet done.

The arrangement of the rooms on the third floor, was as follows: to the left of Peat's room came a turn in the hall. The first room after this turn was Kolmer's. Next to that was the self-run-

ning elevator, then the bathroom, and to the very rear, Marquard's room.

It was to the bathroom that Kolmer made several trips. He wet a handkerchief taken from Peat's trunk and carefully wiped the small blood clot from the iron bed rail, as well as the small clot on the floor. Then he put the handkerchief into the trunk, roped the trunk again and locked it. Thereupon he went into the washroom again and gave his hands a thorough scrubbing.

When Kolmer finally reentered his own room, his confidence was entirely restored. He flattered himself on having eliminated all risk to himself. His brains had turned the trick; his cleverness; his quick-wittedness.

No one in the Marquard house would miss Peat; it was expected that the latter would be gone in the morning. He simply would not arrive at his destination. It was possible that inquiries would be made by letter in several days—perhaps not at all—men frequently change their programs. In any case, the trunk would already be well on its way, and it would not be opened until it had reached San Francisco. Kolmer would have more than ample time to sell the loot and destroy Peat's other effects. And even after the discovery of the crime, how could they possibly connect him with it?

In the morning, the conversation at the breakfast table drifted briefly to Peat.

"The poor fellow never got to see that show after all," remarked Marquard. "Just as Peat was about to leave, his friend, who had the tickets, telephoned that his wife had taken seriously ill. He offered to send the tickets to Peat, but Peat told him to give them to somebody else, saying that a good night's rest wouldn't hurt him just before starting on his trip."

The final tense moment arrived just after breakfast, a bit sooner than Kolmer expected it. Two husky gentlemen called for Peat's trunk. Kolmer was in

his own room, smoking a cigarette when the expressmen came.

He heard the trunk being carried out of Peat's room. He heard it being put into the elevator, and then he heard the elevator shoot down.

And then he heard the voice of Mrs. Marquard call down to her husband: "Carl! Carl! Peat forgot his glasses!"

Kolmer rose and went to his door.

He heard Marquard call back: "His glasses? You mean his eyeglasses?"

"Yes. I just found them on his mantelpiece."

"Say, but that's impossible. You know about Ray's eyes—he's practically blind without his glasses."

"Yes, I know. But maybe he had two pairs——"

"He did until last week when one of them fell off his nose. He didn't have 'em repaired because he said that while he could see through them, he felt he needed a new prescription—and I know that one of the things he hadn't gotten around to doing was seeing an oculist."

"Well, here's his glasses."

"Listen, Hattie, Ray couldn't walk three steps without knowing he wasn't wearing his glasses, much less leave this house during the night and go up to that train depot."

"Then—say, Carl, say, there must be something——"

"There is sure something very phony about Peat going away without his glasses. It's more than phony—it's impossible. I think we ought to have his trunk stopped until——"

"But, Carl——"

"I tell you that if Peat's eyeglasses aren't gone, Peat couldn't have gone either. That's utterly——"

But at this moment, Kolmer stepped into the hall. He had been thinking, rapidly and hard. As he saw it, it was imperative that Peat's trunk leave the house. And Kolmer, too, wore glasses—for reading purposes only. He had recalled that Peat's glasses were similar

to his own in appearance, consisting merely of two lenses and a gold nose piece. He had made no careful search of Peat's room, because he had assumed that everything which Peat intended taking with him—barring his clothes—was already either in the suit case or the trunk. He would now have to attend to that oversight at once.

"Will you let me see those glasses, please, Mrs. Marquard?" The woman gave them to him. "Ah, I thought so; they are mine—my reading glasses, you know. I dropped in on Peat last night to say good-bye and I happened to be toying with my glasses. I remember now that I left them on his mantelpiece; I've been looking for them all morning."

"It's all right, Carl," called Mrs. Marquard to her husband. "They're Kolmer's glasses." Then to Kolmer: "Are you sure?"

Smiling, Kolmer adjusted the glasses on his nose. "Certainly. I guess I know my glasses when I look through them." He made the turn in the hall and seized what he thought was the knob of his door. "Thank you for finding them for me, Mrs.——"

At that moment, Mrs. Marquard, who had followed him, screamed. Hy Kolmer had stepped forward to find himself suddenly hurtling through space and clutching wildly at nothing.

That night, Detective Cary gave the curious details to his chief.

"You see, the elevator is directly next to Kolmer's room, so that its door is also directly next to Kolmer's. There's only about two feet of wall space between them. Looking at the doors from the hall, the elevator door has its knob on the left side. Kolmer's door—due to the space adjustment necessary because of the hall turn—is on the right side, and both doors open outward. You work the elevator with push buttons in the halls and in the car itself. It's not supposed to run if any of the

doors are open, but it does; you know how frequently those things get out of order even in office buildings where they are supposed to be regularly inspected. Mr. Marquard must be absolved of all blame, because he warned his guests, and he's been after a repair company two days to fix the thing.

"What happened is that one of the expressmen who took down the trunk left the elevator door on the third floor stand ajar. And then Kolmer put Peat's eyeglasses on. Now lenses do one or two things: they either help you to see, or they throw your sight out of focus and make it harder or even impossible for you to see. The thick lenses in Peat's reduced everything before Kolmer's eyes to a blur. He was clever, but fate turned his very cleverness against him. He kept Peat's glasses on only a few moments, and he must have made only half a dozen or less steps. The elevator door differs from other doors in that it has a small beveled pane in its center. But Kolmer couldn't see that with Peat's glasses on. Kolmer was naturally excited, so he also failed to notice that the door which he was pulling open moved left instead of right.

"He walked plumb into that elevator shaft from the third floor—and the elevator was on the bottom floor.

"Kolmer came clean in the hospital, just before he died. We couldn't have failed to land him anyhow, because we'd have been sure to look into his suit case for names and addresses of his friends or relatives and other information. And then we'd have come upon Peat's clothes and jewels.

"And as I recall them, Kolmer's last words to me were: 'Looks like nobody can beat a crooked game indefinitely. If a fellow doesn't trip up because he is dumb, he trips up because he is smart.' And then added grimly, 'It's the same difference.'"

THE HELPING HANDS DEPARTMENT

Conducted by Nancy Carter

DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE deals both in its articles and fiction with various forms of crime, the dangers and difficulties to which it leads. Perhaps that is why so many people write the editor for help and advice in solving individual problems. His many duties make it impossible for him to give these letters the personal attention he would like, so he has called upon Mrs. Nancy Carter to lend a helping hand. Mrs. Carter is one helping hand. We need many others. We need yours. The fact that you may be a transgressor will not bar you; it may help you to prevent another from following the dangerous trail which leads to a precipice. Do not hesitate to write fully; your real name and address will not appear in the magazine.

ARE you struggling along in the dark weighed down by a problem and with no glimmer of light as to its solution? Do you find yourself through your own or another's mistakes, or through some unfortunate circumstances, in a painful situation?

Bring your troubles to the Helping Hands Department. We are interested in you and in your story, and want to aid you to find the best way out of your difficulties. We want not only to help you in smoothing your own path, but also we would like to have your suggestions for clearing up the ways of others.

DEAR MRS. CARTER: None in my community, where I am liked and respected, suspects that I once served a prison term. After my release I moved from the States to Australia, where I have led an upright life. Five years ago I met a lovely girl and we were married. I felt I should tell her about my prison term, but I was afraid if she knew she would not marry me. So I kept silent.

During the happy years of our married life I have worried over this a lot, and have felt that in keeping my incarceration a secret from my wife that I have not acted fairly. She is loyal and I cannot believe anything I should tell her would really estrange her from me. Mrs. Carter, ought I, after these years of silence, to tell my wife? Ex-convict.

Perhaps it would have been braver and fairer to have frankly told the woman you love in the beginning of your prison term, and to have taken

your chance of losing her. But now that you have kept silent so long, wouldn't it be kinder, more unselfish to your wife, to withhold from her information which would without doubt cause her great pain and humiliation? It seems so to me. How do other readers feel about this?

DEAR MRS. CARTER: The Helping Hands Department is a real godsend to perplexed people with no one to confide in. I am so troubled about my seventeen-year-old son. He has become one of a rough, bad gang of boys who hang about pool rooms and street corners. Not long ago several of them broke into a neighborhood store and two were caught and are now in jail awaiting sentence. It just happened that my boy was not with them that night. Perhaps a second time he will not be so lucky.

Mrs. Carter, I have done everything in my power to keep him from associating with these rough characters, and the more I remonstrate with him the more determined he is to go his own way. How can I divert his attention to more wholesome channels?

ANXIOUS MOTHER.

Isn't there some one thing that especially interests your boy? If he has a hobby encourage him in it. Perhaps he has a mechanical turn of mind, and if he is given certain tools and appliances he will in working with them forget the disturbing influences outside. Study his talents and by your interest and coöperation help him to develop the higher side of his nature. Never

nag at him. Make home so attractive to him that he will want to spend his evenings there.

DEAR MRS. CARTER: Somewhere the other day I read this: "Every black sheep was once somebody's pet lamb." It made me think of the letter which appeared in your department last week, signed Black Sheep. And written by a girl of seventeen! She ought to be somebody's pet lamb at her age. And those village gossips in her town should be tarred and feathered. It is seldom listed as one, but malignant gossip is a crime. The innocent lives which are wrecked to furnish a lot of fence hangers with the excitement they crave!

I can surely sympathize with this girl. Although not due to village gossip, I'm the black sheep in my family. The worst crime I'm guilty of is being a vagabond. Ever since I was a shaver I've had an uncontrollable itch in my feet. I had to go. My folks consider wandering a disgrace. Every once in a while to please them I go back, get some dull job, and try to settle down. After a month or two I can stand it no longer. I must be on my way again. I resent my family's attitude very much. They are ashamed to mention my name, and when they do speak of me, it is apologetically, as if I were a criminal. They apparently consider roving a crime. Do you think that is a fair view to take?

DON D.

One who selfishly throws aside responsibility and refuses to meet his obligations, to gratify his desire to wander might be considered worthy of blame. On the other hand, many people feel that it broadens and helps a person without ties or obligations to see something of the world.

DEAR MRS. CARTER: I work in a large department store, and about a week ago I saw the girl who works with me at our counter take a chiffon scarf when she thought I was not looking. I don't know where she hid the scarf, but I never saw it again and I'm sure she took it home with her. I am naturally very much upset and in a quandary as to what I ought to do about it. I don't want this girl to get into trouble, of course, but if the loss of the scarf is discovered, the theft may be fastened upon me. Mrs. Carter, would it be best to tell the heads of the store about it? Might it not be a way to save the girl from becoming a regular shoplifter?

WORRIED EDITH.

Your position is a difficult one, but this may be an opportunity for you to help erring feet to the main road again. If you are sure about this theft it would seem kinder to first meet the girl after business hours and have a frank talk with her. Tell her you know of the matter and see if you cannot persuade her either to return the scarf or to pay for it. Try to win her confidence and learn what led to the taking of the scarf. If she denies the theft and refuses to return either scarf or money, the only alternative left you is to report the whole thing to those higher up.

DEAR MRS. CARTER: I've read the letters in the Helping Hands with much interest. I think Mollie B. would have to care a great deal for Charley to marry him in spite of his having stolen that money. I agree with Disappointed Esther that it would be taking a big chance to do such a thing, and I do not understand how Harry C. L. can take theft so lightly. Esther, I am sorry your confidence in your husband was not rewarded. It was courageous of you to marry him in spite of his past mistake. You must live for your little boy now. Elwood, who reached home too late to find his wife, has my deepest sympathy. One of my sons ran away several years ago and we have no idea where he is. I am hoping that he may see Elwood's letter and start with Lonely Wanderer and many other rovers on the homeward trail.

I was indignant when I read Black Sheep's letter. I came from a small town and know what malicious gossip is. There was a girl in my village whose life was wrecked by a bunch of busybodies. If some of these folks who are so careless of words could only realize what harm they are doing I am sure they would be a little more merciful.

CLEMENTINE.

Thanks for your interest, Clementine. I hope when we hear from you again your wanderer will have returned to the fold.

And now again a wide-open invitation to all of you who seek counsel or have counsel to give, to call upon the Helping Hands.

UNDER THE LAMP

By Prosper Buranelli



A Free Clan Then Decided One Point

This department is conducted by Prosper Buranelli for those of you who like puzzles. If there is any particular kind of puzzle that you prefer, please tell us and Mr. Buranelli will do his best to give it to you. Also, won't you work on a puzzle of your own, send it in, and let the other readers wrestle with it.

All letters to this week's problems will be printed in next week's issue of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE.

All letters relative to this department should be addressed to Prosper Buranelli, care of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City.

LAST week, in talking about anagrams, I cited that masterpiece, THEY SEE, which is an anagram of THE EYES. You will observe that it is a rearrangement of the same letters, and that the two phrases certainly do apply one to the other. Here is another fine one, a famous and historical one. It was created in honor of Lord Nelson's victory at the Battle of the Nile, and is in Latin:

HONOR EST A NILO,

which, as you will observe, is a rearrangement of the letters in HORATIO NELSON. It is thus that heroes are celebrated anagrammatically.

Well, to give you a few classics for you to solve, yourself. In the case of each of the pictures given here you rearrange the letters of the various phrases and make other phrases, these

to apply both to the anagrams given and the pictures accompanying them. They are taken from the Key to Puzzledom, which is the official textbook of the National Puzzlers' League, the very grave and venerable brotherhood devoted to the most abstruse perplexities of the cryptic art. The constructors are the



well-known puzzlers: Balmar, Aspericus, and Bolis. See if you can solve these tricky bits.

A contributor, Mr. E. H. Small, makes an excellent suggestion about cryptograms. Says he:

"When you print your answers why don't you point out some of the more obvious clues that the solver might have picked out and perhaps didn't. That procedure would convey a certain amount of instruction in deciphering coded messages; instruction of which many of us beginners are in need."

That's an idea, and I am going to carry it out.

In the first of the following I want



What Roils Men

to point out the second and seventh words and then the ninth and tenth words. A little juggling and you should get them.

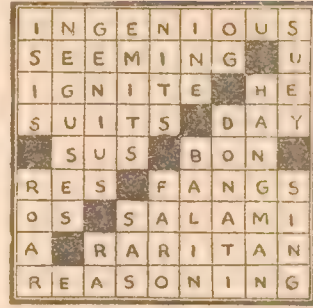
XQL LYQ CFW JQBSF TEW
ZCFUQ LYSZ CEQ. SL SZ QTZA.

LGI JYPP ZYVA MBND OPP YV
MBYH GVN: "MBN FIYEX WK-
GJV ZGS CIDUH GRNK MBN
POTL AGQ."

Last week's answers:

Anagram.

Detectives.



Cryptograms:

You know your mixed-up letters are just what we like. That is why you should give us more.

The best clue here was THAT. In nine cases out of ten a four-letter word with the first and last letters the same is THAT. The ETTE in LETTERS was significant also. In that form the double letter is almost certain to be a consonant, and a vowel preceding and following a consonant is usually E. It may be O or A, but E is more likely.

Devotees of things mystical or symbolic should adopt this enigmatic sport with its intriguing ramifications.

This one was not too easy. I solved it by the following reasoning: The double letter in the first word was either a vowel or a consonant. If a consonant, the last letter was most likely S. Filling in, the S seems to fall about right—several times at the end of words. Then I considered the three last letters of the last word—that is the three last letters before the S. I compared them with the three last letters of the next to last word. Two of the commonest English suffixes are ING and ION, with the I as the common element. I guessed the I, and filled it in. ITS and THIS followed, and the work-out now was easy. I had worked on the supposition that the double letter was a consonant. It was E, but still the reasoning held.

Headquarters Chat

THE editor of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE requests the pleasure of your company at a Christmas party to be given December 25, 1926 at your convenience. Get it at any news stand, take it home with you and enjoy it with our blessings and good wishes, and the larger the number of those who accept our invitation, the greater will be our joy at this happy time of all happy times—Christmas.

While, in spirit, all of the characters and authors that ever appeared in the pages of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE will be with you, in particular you will find, gathered around the festive board and disporting themselves under the light of the brilliantly lighted tree, no other than Nicholas Carter and the archfiend, Doctor Quartz. Also, there will be the charming and delightful Madeleine Sharps Buchanan with a package full of very wicked people and a few good ones; the inimitable Herman Landon, and the still more inimitable Picaroon; prim Charlotte Dockstader with a really, truly Christmas story about a very, very good girl compelled to be very, very naughty because of Christmas; Paul Ellsworth Triem, with some repentant villains who were forced to make some very unhappy people happy at Christmas time; Edward H. Smith, with his company of criminals, and, too, Christopher B. Booth, holding the hand of the confident, smiling Mr Amos Clackworthy.

So, we are going to have a lovely time. We have been making preparations for this merry gathering for a whole year. Do come—no, you don't have to dress. It is very informal. Whatever you happen to have on is

quite all right. And bring your friends.

As to negroes playing poker, a Southern gentleman whose postscript reads, "Needless to say this is not a letter a prospective physician would care to see over his name," has this information:

"DEAR EDITOR: I am not writing to you for notoriety, et cetera. Perhaps some other time I may essay to place my ideas in such form that perchance they may be worth printing.

"In the present issue under Headquarters Chat, however, I notice some correspondence as to whether or not the Southern negro plays poker: I can say this much, that on our plantation in Mississippi we keep a store, or commissary, and among the things that we carry are playing cards. I have sold many a deck to the negroes, but never one to a white customer.

"Again, frequently I go into the ranch house—or chow house—to see that things are getting along all right, that the meals are prepared, et cetera, and during the off days I have frequently seen the negroes playing cards. If they play cards at all, why not poker? Again, the gentleman from Nashville referred to in the letter should be well enough acquainted with the negro to know that he tries to copy the white man in everything, and poker is not an unknown game to the Southern planter.

"Triem is the author of the story concerning which the argument arose."

K. G. Cobb of 925 North Orange Avenue, Sarasota, Florida, tells us to go right straight ahead.

"DEAR EDITOR: I have just read with interest the two contradictory letters written by one Mr. Brinnrac and Mr. C. C. Hamilton, respectively, and cannot refrain from handing you herewith this letter.

"It may be that the characters of The Crimson Clown and Mr. Chang are 'impossible,' but the statement that 'You can't please everybody' is an indisputable fact. By the way, what proof, I wonder, has Mr. Brinnrac that The Crimson Clown and Mr. Chang are 'impossible' characters? This statement tends to show that Mr. Brinnrac has never had any contact with the underworld. There are, and especially among the Chinese, just such characters as Mr. Chang in actual life to-day. The strangler's cord is a well-known art among the Chinese. Furthermore, Orientals invariably have a very fertile brain, as is evidenced by the speed and thoroughness with which they go through our own colleges.

"If Mr. Brinnrac does not relish this type of argument, why not look at the question from this angle? We see every day the things that are possible. We experience personally these things. Why not read of the impossible, or things we do not see every day? What was said of the experiments of Orville Wright when he was talking of flying? What was said of the steam engine while it was in the making? In fact, what was said regarding every other similar invention while it was in its elementary stage? Invariably the answer is 'impossible.' So who knows what is possible and what is impossible? I wonder what Mr. Brinnrac would say if some wily chink were to slip the strangler's cord about his own neck some quiet, still, dark night?

"You go right ahead and publish the Mr. Chang and Crimson Clown stories. Put it to a vote of the readers if you wish, and you will find about one out of twenty who will agree with Mr. Brinn-

rac. I'll wager that Mr. Hamilton of Eldorado is a well-read man. Also that he does not confine his literature to any one special type, but reads everything, as any well-read individual really should. My best regards to a man of wisdom."

Miss Minnie Naujokas of 3334 Parnell Avenue, Chicago, Illinois, says:

"DEAR EDITOR: The stories of The Crimson Clown, Mr. Chang, The Pica-roon, and Thubway Tham are my favorites. I have been a reader of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE, and I have never missed an issue of this magazine."

Edgar Welch of 914 North Second Avenue, Tucson, Arizona, says he likes us in general, and in particular, but I wish he would stop that "on and off" business. Be a regular, Mr. Welch, won't you, please?

"DEAR EDITOR: I have read DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE for years, off and on, and think it has the best fiction of any detective magazine. I like the old characters, and would certainly like to hear of Mr. Clackworthy again. I could write pages on how I like Johnston McCulley's work, but I will prove how closely I read his stories by suggesting that in 'The Crimson Clown Pursues Himself' it was poor criminal policy for him to throw away his gas gun and hypodermic. Such things can be traced, especially the gun! However, the story was great, and the idea for destroying the silk suit was very practical, though quite unusual. A little glycerin poured on cloth that is impregnated with potassium permanganate would be one way of doing it.

"Austin Small's serials are just about perfect. I wish that there was an installment of one in every number, but I realize it takes time to write such masterpieces."

MISSING

This department conducted in duplicate in DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE and WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, thus giving readers double service, is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable. Because "copy" for a magazine must go to the printer long in advance of publication, don't expect to see your notice till a considerable time after you send it.

If it can be avoided, please do not send us a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

LEA, GEORGIE.—Left Canada when thirteen years old. Dark hair, brown eyes. Please write to Sue, Edna Seisom, 712 Markham Street, Durham, North Carolina.

TYSON, ARTHUR.—Missing from Port Dalhousie, Ontario, since July, 1925. Age twenty-four, medium height, brown hair, blue eyes. His mother will appreciate any information concerning her son. Mrs. W. C. Tyson, Port Dalhousie, Ontario, Canada. General Delivery.

GARRISON, "SANDY" M.—He was prospecting in Arizona when last heard from. His brother has important news for him and will greatly appreciate any information concerning him. W. Garrison, 903-360 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

"SATAN."—My heart is breaking. Please come home or write immediately. I promise you that there will be no more trouble. Your mother is going to give us a fresh start. Love. "Sugar."

JACK.—Regardless of everything, I still love you and wonder why you have not written. Please let me hear from you, or else come back before Christmas, so that life will be worth while once more. "Bee-Bum."

WILCOX, C. A.—Please write to your friend at the post office, General Delivery, Baltimore, Maryland.

EVERETT, MAXINE or CORNIE EBERSOLE.—Last heard of in Pocatello, Idaho, about twelve years ago. Information will be greatly appreciated. Louise Fleming, 1957 North Twenty-third Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

ROCKMAN, FRANK.—Last heard of in Chicago, Illinois. I am anxious to hear from you. Please write to "Gertie," care of this magazine.

DUDLEY, CHARLES W.—No matter where you are, please write. I am very anxious to hear from you. Va.

HOWARD B.—If you still love us, please come home before it is too late. Lucille and the baby need your help. Please write a letter to me, in care of this magazine. Mrs. H. B.

McCRORY, BILLIE.—Answered your advertisement in "Western Story Magazine" and letter was returned. Write us at Lakeview, Washington, Box 83. Bill and Billie Morgan.

LOCKE, MRS. MARK.—Supposed to be in Texas or Oklahoma. Please write to me, care of this magazine. Mrs. A. J. E.

WILSON, Mrs. WILLIAM.—Name before marriage was Annie Evans. Left Greenock, Scotland, over thirty years ago. Your old friend, Janet Davidson, inquires. My address is Mrs. J. M. McArthur, 31 Leeper Street, St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada.

BURGADINE, FRANK.—Was taken by two women in Little Rock, Arkansas, when three years old. Mother needs you now, so please write to sister, Mrs. Edward Syson, Route 3, Box 112A, South Bend, Indiana.

BURGADINE, WILLIE MAY.—Mr. Condell took you away when you were seven years old. Mother needs you. Please write to your sister, Mrs. Edward Syson, Route 3, Box 112A, South Bend, Indiana.

MCDONALD, JAMES.—Nicknamed "Sandy." Medium height, fair, age about fifty years. Relatives would like to hear from him. Address all communications to James MacDougall, 47 Morse Street, Newton, Massachusetts.

HILL, DAVID.—Last heard from in March, 1924. Was near Akron, Iowa, and was on his way home by river with two skiffs. Married. Age about twenty-two. Information will be greatly appreciated by Guy L. Hill, Lock Box 368, Athol, Missouri.

COLE, CHARLES THOMAS.—An engineer on some foreign-trade boat line. Last heard of in Glasgow, Scotland, nine years ago. Please write to Mrs. Annie Cole Cochran, 325 Thirty-seventh Street, Fairfield, Birmingham, Alabama.

PIANO, JOSEPH J.—A very good vocalist. With a traveling company at Scranton, Pennsylvania, in 1918, when last heard of. Before the war his home was at Staunton, Illinois. Mrs. E. J. Heintz, Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin. Box 22.

ARCULEER, THOMAS J. J.—A Belgian by birth. About forty-two years of age, medium height, dark. Left Tulsa, Oklahoma, in 1918. Was a decorator of carnivals. Let me hear from you. I have forgiven all. Love, Maud Arculeer, R. R. 6, Box 380, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

ZABOROWSKI, ALBERT.—Last heard from in Seattle, Washington. Please write. Frank Thomas, 626 South Fifth Street, La Crosse, Wisconsin.

READETTE, PAUL.—Honorably discharged from the U. S. S. "Pennsylvania" in September, 1925. Your grandfather is ill and wants to see you once more. Please write to me. Mrs. Sadie Barber, Route 3, Mason, Tennessee.

RUSHENACK, "MIKE."—Last heard from in New York City. Please write to George S. Evanchuck, Lemont Furnace, Pennsylvania.

ROY.—Won't you please write to Esther or me? Mamma worried to death because she doesn't hear from you. Violet.

DOLPHAND, MARY ELLEN.—Has a son about fifteen. Medium build, black hair, dark eyes, mole on right temple. Mrs. G. D.

MALLOY, MARGARET MAY.—Blonde, about nineteen years old. Taken by some people when she was a child in Los Angeles, California. Needed to settle an estate. Roy O. Malloy, U. S. Veterans' Hospital, No. 86, Sheridan, Wyoming.

O'HARA, PATRICK and RONK, KENNETH.—Last heard from at Livingston, Montana. Mother would like to hear from or of them. Mrs. C. T. Leavenworth, 106 Therow Street, Johnson City, New York.

"BUDDY."—Adopted by Charles Draker shortly before his mother's death in Benton Harbor, Michigan, fourteen years ago. Mildred McCreary Smith, 307 E Street, N. W., Washington, District of Columbia.

TOWNSEND, JAMES A.—Will you please write to me, your wife, Mildred McCreary Smith, 307 E Street, N. W., Washington, D. C.

G. W. S.—Left California in June or July and is supposed to have gone to Idaho. Please write. P. E. T., care of this magazine.

HAWES, RUSSELL LELAND.—Of Danville, Illinois. Formerly of the United States Marine Corps. An old buddy would like to hear from you. Leslie H. Usher, 139 Stanton Avenue, Riverside, East Providence, Rhode Island.

HENKEN, FRIEDA.—Spanish and Jewish descent. Formerly of New York. Communicate with one who has never forgotten. R. F. F., care of this magazine.

KELLEY, ANNA BELL.—Lost to me for ten years. Originally of Davenport, Iowa. Please write to Charles L. Switzer, care of S. S. "Maricopa," Sault Sainte Marie, Michigan.

JOHNSON, RUTH.—Of Beloit, Wisconsin. My address is Charles L. Switzer, care of S. S. "Maricopa," Sault Sainte Marie, Michigan.

BECKT, EDWARD FABIAN.—Joined the U. S. navy. Would like to get in touch with him. Harold M. Labritz, 418 East 135th Street, New York City.

WOOD, ROBERT ARCHIE.—Last seen in Watsonville, California, in 1914. Medium height, light hair. Information thankfully received by his sister, Verian Barcus, East Central Avenue, Route 23, Orlando, Florida.

WALTERS, JOE.—I am back in our home town and everything is all right, but I am dreadfully worried about you. Write to the address given you, and I will answer. Only S. and R. will know. Love. M.

BARRETT, AMOS or JOHN THOMAS.—Left Arcadia, Louisiana, in 1915. Father, we hold nothing against you. Mother and William are dead. Come or write to Chester E. Lee Barrett, 2340 South Phoenix Avenue, West Tulsa, Oklahoma.

SIPES, BENJAMIN.—Please write to your old pal, "Stub."

HAROLD D.—Would like to hear from you in care of this magazine. "Chuck" R.

RAYMOND, BLANCHE.—Of 1128 Elizabeth Avenue, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Last heard of in San Francisco, California. Please communicate with Stephen E. Raymond, 291 West Bridge Street, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

RHODES, HAZEL.—Born November, 1907. Last heard of staying with a friend named Mary Rotter, of Springfield, Illinois. Any one having information please write to Julia Lee Stapp, in care of this magazine.

REGAN, FRANK E.—Age about forty-nine. White hair. Was working as a mason in St. Louis, Missouri, in July, 1925. Lived prior to that in Montana. His sister would welcome news of him. Address Mrs. M. Warren, Leonard Road, Melrose, Massachusetts.

WETHERILL, EDWARD B.—Wanted as witness to settle an estate. Married Malvina C. Rodsdale at Fort Totten, Dakota Territory, in 1877. Last heard from at Minneapolis, Minnesota, in 1894. Address William E. Rodsdale, care of this magazine.

CLARKE, WILLIAM A.—Dark hair and eyes, about forty-five years of age. Last heard from at Seattle, Washington, two years ago. Would like to get in touch with him. L. Clarke, 715 Second Avenue, Verdun, Quebec, Canada.

McKENNA, J. M.—Mac, have you forgotten the skating rink and your promise that you would come back some time? Have waited a long time for you. Jess.

WALTERS or MARTIN, A. J.—He was having his mail sent to the Y. M. C. A., at Oakland, California, when last heard from. Please write, Al dear, for I am sorry and value our friendship. Use the name that I used before, Jess, care of this magazine.

COYLE, CATHERINE.—Left at the age of two weeks in charge of the New York Foundling Hospital. Later adopted by a family in Morrowville, Kansas. Would like very much to locate my real father and mother and relatives. Address Mrs. G. J. Swartz, care of this magazine.

DADDY.—Am ill, and have not been able to work. Won't you please write? I love you. "Bee," 345 West Monument Avenue, Dayton, Ohio.

BERRY, C.—Very lonesome. Please write. G. H., care of this magazine.

CHAMPION, ALLYN R.—An electrician in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, when last heard from. Please write your father, D. A. Champion, Box 388, Little Falls, N. Y.

BURKE, LILY O.—Last heard of in Phoenix, Arizona, in 1918. Home address was Chicago, Illinois. Am still waiting for you. Any information appreciated by Homer C. Tyner, Box 237, Hanford, King's County, California.

PARKHURST, DEWEY.—Tall, dark hair, about twenty-six years old. Was in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1924. Home in St. Petersburg, Illinois. Write S. L., care of this magazine.

LANGLEY, CLYDE.—Last seen in Cromwell and Shawnee, Oklahoma. Would like to hear from him. Lena Schilling, 1995 Lemon Avenue, Long Beach, California.

MILLS, SAMUEL A.—In the Canadian army during the World War. His home was in Rhode Island. Last heard of in Eureka, California. Please write your pal, Helen, care of this magazine.

ROWLEY, ANTHONY.—Left Dayton, Ohio, in 1913. Heard from later in Oklahoma. Information appreciated by his sister, Maryellen Oswald, 235 College Park Avenue, Dayton, Ohio.

WILSON, JENNIE.—Had a daughter Naomi. Lived in Mason City, Iowa, in 1916. Later moved to Denver, Colorado, where her husband died. Would like to hear from her. Mrs. I. C. Lake, 1738 Twentieth Avenue, Rock Island, Illinois.

MITCHELL, EVE and FRANK.—Left Rock Island in July, 1923. Believed to have gone West. Please write me. I won't say anything. Mary.

LOVE, CLARENCE M. or JACK.—Was with a theatrical company in St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1924. Communicate with your cousin, "Baby," care of this magazine.

MacBAIR, ROBERT.—We need you, Mother ill. Please send me your address. May, Box 253, Springfield, Tennessee.

TURNER, LEWIS.—Son of Samuel E. Turner and Margaret McNamara Turner. Sixteen years old in December of this year. Any information will be appreciated by his aunt, Anna J. McNamara, 1437 South Fifty-second Street, West Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

PITTSBURG LOU.—Formerly of Maysville, Kentucky. Please communicate with T. B., care of this magazine.

Mrs. H. M. B.—Formerly of Pittston, Pennsylvania. Have some very good news for you. G. H. S.

TYLER, ALBERT EDWARD.—BeHeved to be residing in Somerville, Massachusetts. Please communicate with your daughter, Mrs. Edna Alice Aldridge, 38 Dickens Road, Tientsin, China.

WHITEFORD, JAMES.—Left Scotland in 1902. About forty-six years of age. Tailor by trade. Information sought by Mrs. Jennie W. Stirling, Collard, Washington.

WHITEFORD, JOHN.—Born in Belfast, Ireland. Left Scotland in 1902. Last heard of twenty-two years ago, working on a farm in Ontario, Canada. Mrs. Jennie W. Stirling, Collard, Washington.

ELIOTT, ALECK B.—Rawdon is dead. I want very much to see you. Please write to me, C. W. Elliott, Petersburg, Alaska.

SWEDEN, ROY.—Very anxious to hear from you. Mrs. N. A. Sweden, Nashville, Arkansas.

HENDON, MURL G.—Served with the 19th U. S. Infantry during the war. Last heard from in Okmulgee, Oklahoma. Any information will be appreciated. William F. Lowry, 1401 Chester Avenue, Bremerton, Washington.

LASSITER, FAY.—Living in Tulsa or Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, in 1918 and 1919. Please communicate with William F. Lowry, 1401 Chester Avenue, Bremerton, Washington.

PETERSEN, CARRIE.—Write Peggy, 1805 West Seventh Street, Oakland, California.

GIVLIN, JOSEPH.—Born near Seaforth, Ontario, about 1872. Needed to settle an estate. Anna Givlin, 1 Tenth Street, Santa Rosa, California.

WALL, ROBERT.—Went to Australia from Edinburgh, twenty-four years ago, and last heard from at Bundaberg, Queensland, in 1914. His oldest sister and family would be glad to hear from him. Address Miss Buckle, care of this magazine.

CRAWFORD, F. O.—His son, Curl Crawford, is very anxious to find him. Please write, J. H. Murphy, Ben Wheeler, Texas.

KRAMER, Mrs. GEORGE W.—Widow with three sons. Living in Oakland when last heard from two years ago. Very much concerned for their welfare. Mrs. E. K., 2761 North Hope Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

DADDY.—Sorry for what I did. Children need and want you. Write care of Hallie. Will always love you. Addie.

JOHNSON, BESSIE.—Your old friend would like very much to hear from you. Ada Hinton, 411 North Tenth Street, Neodesha, Kansas.

SHUMWAY, LEON P.—Disappeared from his home in Buffalo, New York, in July, 1925. Thirty-seven years of age, medium height, brown hair, blue eyes. Building contractor. Any information concerning him will be greatly appreciated by his heartbroken mother, Mrs. Eliza Shumway, 708 South West A Street, Richmond, Indiana.

SPRAGIN, WAYNE, or ALLEN STEVENS.—Your son needs you badly, for strangers are mistreating him. Now is the time for you to get him. Write to W. P., care of this magazine.

JIMMIE.—Write your mother, giving better address, as she has something for you. Mrs. Louisa Kirk, 506 East Crane Avenue, Valdosta, Georgia.

WATERS, FORREST.—I have often wondered what became of you. Your kindness to me, when I was a college student in Philadelphia, cannot be forgotten. Please write to Ralph, care of this magazine.

LEE, WILLIAM MARIAN.—Twenty-six years of age in March, 1926. Tall, slender, brown hair and eyes. Formerly soldiered in the Hawaiian Islands. Please write your old buddy, D. S., Box 174, Fort Douglas, Utah.

CRENSHAW, LEHI S.—Plays clarinet, violin, and does some composing. Soldiered in the States from 1920 to 1923. Please write to your old buddy, D. S., Box 174, Fort Douglas, Utah.

JOSLIN, E. R.—A relative would like to hear from you. Please write, C. S. Joslin, Box 722, National Military Home, Kansas.

T. C. M. P. Y. C.—It was the real thing. Could you let us know that you are well and happy? Bub Bub, care of this magazine.

Mrs. O. M. C.—Please write and let me know how Irene is. H. F. C.

KUHN, GEORGE.—Don't you want to hear from us any more? We got your card from Canada, but would like to know where you are and what you are doing. Mother, care of this magazine.

CARVER, NORA, VERA, and WILDA.—I should like to hear from my mother and sisters. Charles S. Carver, Box 654, Miami, Oklahoma.

SEACATS, JACOBS, MASTERS, and DELAYS.—Write to me, for I wish information concerning my father's people. Pearl.

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